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**Braving the Elements:  
The Writing Process of “The Big Empty”**

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**Braving the Elements:  
The Writing Process of “The Big Empty”**

**by**

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**Report**

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

**Master of Fine Arts**

**The University of Texas at Austin**

**December 2015**

## **Abstract**

### **Braving the Elements: The Writing Process of “The Big Empty”**

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2015

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The following report details the writing process of the feature screenplay “The Big Empty” from conception through outline, first draft, field research, subsequent rewrite, and future plans. I will examine these steps in order to better understand the creative choices made between initial inspiration and current screenplay draft, and address the differences.

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## **Chapter 1: Flying the Big Empty**

Five hundred feet off the deck at one hundred fifty miles per hour with zero visibility – fall Alaska flying at its finest. The type of weather pilots play down as being a bit “scuzzy,” and guides refer to as “dogshit.” The sort of blinding whiteout that takes down a handful of bush planes and kills off a dozen or so pilots, guides, and clients every season. I glance around the cramped cockpit of our DeHavilland Beaver floatplane and take in my immediate company. Four obese Icelandic millionaires – blissfully unaware of the immediate peril – snore, rocking to the turbulence like puppets caught on the same string, as our veteran pilot, Ken, somehow manages to Jedi his way through the storm by feel. At that moment, Ken cranks the yoke, bailing out of the pass, turning the plane in a wide arc. The force of the bank pops the copilot door open allowing in a blast of Arctic air. This wakes and throws our larger-than-life Scandinavian clients into a panic. I submit to silently waiting for the mountain wall to appear mere feet in front of us through the fog thinking, “These are not the people I want to die with.” That is until my friend and fellow guide, Hayden, takes my hand. Hayden is bowed in silent prayer, which scares me all the more because I didn’t even know him to be religious let alone attempt prayer. I don’t join him in prayer or shy away from holding his hand, but I take consolation in the fact that, “Yes, I can die beside this person...”

Luckily it never comes to that because Ken makes the turn – how close the mountain wall was, we’ll never know, because we never saw it through the fog – and beelines it out of the pass. We touchdown on a mountain lake to wait out the storm,

which turns out to last the duration of one sleepless night spent shivering in our cramped cockpit. Not a sole complains that night, not even our uber-wealthy clients aboard, because we all understand the alternative. That night, while huddled between and – for once – thankful for our rather girthy clientele, I tried to piece together a story in which events like these could play out, because shit like this happens all of the time in Alaska. Close calls and near scares are common occurrences and nothing more than blips on the radar with bush flying – but how to relay that to the general populous in an entertaining and honest manner? Several books and television reality series have attempted the feat, but they are either viewed as sensationalized or episodic (chapter by chapter accounts of different stories and scares). I wanted to encapsulate both in an engaging story. That was three years ago this October and the beginning of *The Big Empty*.

In the following years to come, I worked on other projects but *The Big Empty* remained in the back of my mind ruminating. I knew almost immediately that my protagonist would be an amalgamate of myself and many of the guides and pilots I’ve worked with over the years, because I wanted to focus primarily on story and not spend an exorbitant amount of time and energy creating and getting to know a protagonist from scratch, hence, Seward Saxon was born. I also moved forward with the assumption that *The Big Empty* would involve a significant Inuit presence as most of my stories tend be driven by the idea of identity for those Americans caught between conflicting worlds. With that understanding, I searched for a setting to populate my story and set about searching for a geographic location in line with those thematic elements. Diomedes was the obvious answer – a tiny island with a miniscule Inuit population literally sandwiched

between conflicting worlds – Russia and The United States. Its people belonging to neither the East nor West but, rather, inhabiting an isolated world of their own.

With my protagonist, story people, setting, and thematic elements in place, the next hurdle was to figure out how to make them all collide. What would cause a hunting guide and pilot to transect the international boundary line between Russia and Alaska, thus, giving him the opportunity to crash-out in Diomedes? Throughout this entire developmental process, I set my sights squarely on keeping the story in a similar vein to the popular action/adventure films of the nineties like that of *Cliffhanger*. Coming to terms with what genre I'd be writing under helped me to understand that some illicit activity (murder, drugs, human trafficking) would drive my protagonist to Russia and back. I settled on drug running because I liked the simplicity of the potential backstory of it, and didn't want the viewer to dwell on that particular aspect of the story. The drugs, Oligarch, and Russian components of the story feel like a very distant C-story. Again, knowing my genre, I understood that action/adventure C-stories take up very little screen time and felt like drugs would be the best vehicle to jump-start our story and allow me to quickly move onto the more significant A and B storylines.

The pieces were in place and the basic bones of *The Big Empty's* structure were beginning to fit together – after a drug deal gone wrong, big game guide and pilot, Seward Saxon, would crash-out in the tiny Inuit village of Diomedes with a plane full of money and drugs. The story's spine immediately sprawled out before me. Seward's time among the Inuit would in fact be the B-story, while the through line of the money and pursuing drug dealers would remain the A-story. With my A and B stories set – and after



a night on Netflix – I had a revelation that my story structure very closely resembled that of the 1985 Academy Award winning screenplay for *Witness*.

## Chapter 2: Be Better than the Oscar Winner

Touching so closely upon the *Witness*-structure posed an enormously daunting hurdle of how do you improve upon an Oscar winning script? However, early on in the outlining phase, Professor Stuart Kelban helped circle the fact that *Witness* had one large glaring weakness to it – the second act all but dropped the A-story to primarily reside with the B-story. Losing your A-story for any amount of time is a massive issue in any script, let alone missing it for half of the film. The good news was there was indeed room for improvement on a hugely successful script and story made thirty years prior, which spelled potential success if done correctly. The bad news was the major problem that plagued the *Witness* script potentially threatened mine. All I had to do was be better than the Oscar Winner. Easy, right?

Despite several words of concern from Professor Kelban, my initial attempt at structuring *The Big Empty* modeled a nearly identical beat structure to that of *Witness*. I felt the film was old enough, and my content different enough, that the resemblance wouldn't show. I also assumed that emulating success wasn't a bad thing, and felt that the higher-octane nature of my script would carry *The Big Empty* through points where *Witness* floundered. Simply put, I thought the Amish world to be boring – comically so – and felt the more foreign, and faster paced Inuit world better disguise the points in the script where we venture away from the A-story. In fact, I touched back to the A-story throughout Act II the same amount of times and duration (down to the minute) that *Witness* does. My not-so-sound theory was, with a similar structure and more exciting

story than that of *Witness*, *The Big Empty* could do no worse. Academy Award, here I come!

Lost among the wilderness of my second act, I quickly realized that my theory was seriously flawed. Deviating from my A-story to such a degree during Act II caused me to lose sight of where I was going. Seward lost all drive and forward trajectory to accomplish his overarching goal and the story, as a result, meandered and fell flat. Honestly, *Witness* did the same but it was well disguised by a strong love-story B-plot and an interesting assimilation of the audience to Amish culture. I had relied upon the incorrect story elements to carry us through the second act. It wasn't high-paced action but, rather, it was solid love-driven B-story between Ferno and Seward and an honest approach to shedding light on the foreign world of Inuit culture. It was abundantly clear that replicating the structure of *Witness* wouldn't be enough to make for a successful script. For my second pass, I would use its structure as more of a guideline and branch off into the wilderness of act two on my own.

Major amendments for act two would entail: more A-story beats of Moses and the Krokodil hunting down Seward, a more outward and apparent drive for Seward to find the money (GOAL), a more centralized and dramatic arc for the Seward-Ferno love story, and a deeper in depth depiction of Inuit culture along the Bering Strait. All and all – in the words of Professor Cindy McCreery – everything needed to be harder for Seward in Act II. Seward's assimilation and acceptance into Inuit society, his relationship with Ferno, his internal demons, and his slipping Moses, Krokodil, and the Russian drug cartel all needed to be more difficult the second time around. There was still much work to be

done with the second act but it gave me hope that the issues plaguing the first draft, and *Witness* itself, were still solvable. Now that structural changes for the second draft were soundly in place, it was time to address first draft character flaws and thematic inconsistencies. What better way to do that than by saving (or killing) the cat.

### **Chapter 3: Saving (or Killing) the Cat**

Besides figuring out how to best juggle the A and B story throughout Act II, I had the most difficult time with whether Seward should kill or save a damn wolf on page one. It made it all the more difficult that the workshop was divided down the middle on the issue. The ever-infallible Professor Kelban even seemed torn on the first major decision made by the protagonist. On the surface, it seemed like a somewhat non-issue but, in all reality, whether Seward killed or saved the wolf set his character, determined his arc, and firmly established the theme for the remainder of the film. This was a major decision I had to sort out sooner rather than later because it dramatically and thematically dictated the course of my story.

For example, in an initial draft Seward flew his client alongside the fleeing she-wolf on page one allowing the Heavyside Houstonian to shoot the defenseless creature, essentially “killing the cat.” There were several pros and cons to this approach as raised by the workshop. First off, “killing the cat,” as it’s commonly referred to in screenwriting speak, is the complete inverse to common use of the device because it alienates the audience from your protagonist – a major issue in any script. More typically, the protagonist “saves the cat” somewhere early on in the script in order to allow for the audience to empathize with he or she. Killing the wolf seriously jeopardized the audience’s ability to get onboard and root for Seward throughout the duration on the story. However, despite the risk, killing the wolf allowed for a more dramatic character arc for Seward – the deeper the low the greater the catharsis at the end – but it served as a daunting hill to climb. Lastly, killing the wolf more concretely setup many of the

thematic elements in play. In the beginning, Seward (representative of western society) is a KILLER – kills defenseless wolf for sport --> by the end Seward is a HUNTER (representative of Inuit society) – kills whale, Moses, and Krokodil for survival. Overall, killing the cat on the opening page established my theme but made for a potentially unlikeable protagonist. Inversely, saving the wolf on the opening page posed an equal number of pros and cons.

If Seward were to save the wolf on the opening page – by rocking the plane and sending the hunter's shot off its mark – he has, for all intents and purposes, saved the cat, thus, making him empathetic and likeable. Audience members, on a whole, will have an easier time connecting with Seward and cheering him on for the remainder of the story – terrific. However, if Seward saves the she-wolf, he isn't exactly a killer at the beginning, which totally muddles the theme and character arc of KILLER --> HUNTER. Different issues at play but, nonetheless, an equally challenging the decision.

Without delaying the surprise, I chose to go with the latter – Seward would save the wolf. After hearing the vitriol spewed by several classmates regarding what they thought about a character that shoots wolves from a plane, I thought this was a far too hot button issue to tackle and a far too low of place to start my protagonist. There was a good chance there would be no redeeming Seward, and therefore no story, if he killed this wolf. My ultimate justification for saving the wolf was I could risk muddling the theme of the story, but I couldn't risk the protagonist's likeability. *The Big Empty* would never take flight if the majority of the audience viscerally hated its protagonist's guts on page one.

The hard decision had been made and I had to move forward with the repercussions of that decision seeing how both sides of the issue raised an equal number of pros and cons. The fallout of saving the wolf was thematic collapse and the subsequent rebuilding process. But what to do with a hunter who doesn't hunt, and how do you give shades of grey to a protagonist who so literally saves the cat on the first page to allow for a significant character arc?

## **Chapter 4: Hunting for Theme**

All of the issues previously discussed and since encountered at this point in the writing process have been expected hurdles and interesting challenges. However, the far most frustrating and unexpected roadblock I encountered was dealing with the heavily thematic and central nature of hunting in the script.

The initial hope with the theme was to shed light on the extreme differences between sport hunting and subsistence hunting – a major point of contention in the hunting world. I reside in the subsistence side of the issue, having been raised in a family and continue to live a lifestyle where I subsist off wild game and fish caught by myself, family, and friends, and abstain from buying any processed or farm raised meat. I, and many hunters, also have a serious, serious issue with the idea of sport hunting and killing an animal for the mere sake of a photo or a mount on a wall. I only mention my personal beliefs – not because they hold any importance or credibility – but to exemplify the fact that there is a vast grey scale in the world of hunting, and had hoped to personify that gradation with Seward's arc from KILLER to HUNTER.

I soon realized, however, that I had entered the conversation with people raised much differently than myself, in regards to hunting. People raised without hunting in their lives primarily saw the practice in a black and white manner. You either hunt (i.e. killing animals for sport or subsistence all falls under the same umbrella), or you don't. One side is vilified, the other is not – this was going to be a harder road to thematically traverse and a tougher pill to swallow than initially anticipated.



I was immediately met with backlash regarding the hunting heavy nature of the script upon first draft, but understood that the entirety of the story was built on the foundation of hunting, and knew that couldn't change. So, the next option was how to broach the thematic subject matter in a manner that wasn't going to turnoff the majority of the audience. Heated class discussions on the foundations of hunting detracted from the story and were major influencers on going the route of Seward saving the wolf. The hunting theme was intended to bolster the story not dominate the conversation. I had to find a more subtle way around the issue.

## Chapter 5: Building Better Backstory

With Seward choosing to save the wolf, I was left with hunter who didn't hunt, or – moreover – kill. The obvious follow-up question was, why – *Why couldn't he kill?* I had to build a backstory around why Seward had suddenly lost that ability. This backstory also went through a series of changes and adjustments. I toyed with the idea of Seward dealing with divorce or struggling with the passing of his mother – neither of which really completing the necessary task of earning Seward's starting place of a non-hunting hunting guide. It needed to be bigger, heavier. I decided to couple both initial attempts into Seward's wife having recently been killed by an impaired driver with the assumption that witnessing the likes of that would turn anyone off of death, including the most avid hunter.

With Seward's new backstory forming in my mind for the rewrite, I also decided to play up the fact that he couldn't kill. For instance, in the first twelve pages (first reel from opening to inciting incident) Seward can't kill the wolf, his wife's killer, or himself. Tracking that thematic arc through the current draft, Seward goes from being a KILLER before the story starts (sport hunting guide), to having lost the ability to KILL in Act I (wolf, wife's killer, self), to regaining the ability to the ability to HUNT in Act II (Inuit style subsistence hunter), to becoming a HUNTER in Act III (kills Moses, Krokodil, and whale for survival).

Through a bit of manipulation and massaging the theme, I was able to regain the nice, concrete, and traceable character arc of Seward transitioning from KILLER --> HUNTER. The major adjustment being that Seward is a KILLER before the story starts,

rather than when it starts. I admit that a little clarity is lost in the protagonist's arc because of the change, but believe far more is gained in terms of the protagonist's likeability resulting in a significant net gain.

## Chapter 6: Open Door Policy

During the final workshop for *The Big Empty* in April of 2015 and, perhaps, the final class of my academic career, Professor Kelban gave me an overarching note regarding my script that will change how I approach my writing for the rest of my life. The note was in reference to the midpoint scene where Ferno finally reveals to Seward that her parents drowned some years ago using the Northern Lights as thinly veiled subtext. It remains my favorite scene in the story, and I was admittedly proud he referenced it, but he quickly followed with the matter of fact statement that ALL of my scenes need to read like this – not one or two.

For clarity's sake, I admitted that I thought sequences should build in dramatic tension – light and fun, light and fun, high drama – which is how I built my sequences in act two the first go around. Stuart's answer will forever change my writing process. He agreed that sequences need to build toward a dramatic crescendo, but to think of a sequence like an open door. Your protagonist must make his way through an open door to reach a desired answer or goal. Each scene he or she progressively moves closer and further through the door until breaching the threshold. The first scene he approaches the door, tucks tail, and runs. The second scene he reaches the door, pokes his head through, doesn't like what he sees and diverts. For the third scene, the protagonist summons his courage and bursts through the door achieving a piece of knowledge, clue, or goal, which subsequently opens another door. With this allegory, I'll dub the Open Door Policy, there is still a build in dramatic tension but it is unified by a character's goal or desire and it keeps the story beats from becoming stale or repetitive.

I had been told dozens of times that stories are all about “secrets” and, over the course of that story, layers of the onion are progressively peeled away. It wasn’t until I was enlightened by the Open Door Policy that I realized I had never truly been clear on that concept. It was essentially the same idea, and a simple one at the heart of it, but Stuart’s way of explaining finally clicked for me and I was instantly reenergized to go back through the script with that kernel of knowledge in mind. It stood to change everything and help to solve my act two woes.

## Chapter 7: Stepping Back to Get Closer

In May, after stepping through the Open Door, I had an insatiable itch to speed back through *The Big Empty*, but chose to wait due a number of life factors. My time in Austin was up and I had some big decisions ahead of me. Long story short, two paths lay ahead of me that ensuing summer which would determine the rest of my life: move to LA, get married, and work on my thesis, or move to Alaska, break up, and delay my thesis until the following fall semester. As usual, I chose the road less travelled but not without much trepidation and many sleepless nights.

I am now confident I made that right decision not only for myself but for my story. For four months I guided fishing and hunting in the “Big Empty,” with little thought to the story itself beyond jotting occasional notes in a waterproof notebook I’d keep tucked in my waders and on the floatplane. I consciously stepped away from the story to allow the harsh, magical world of Alaska wash over me. The hope was return to the lower forty-eight and *The Big Empty* at summer’s end bursting with ideas, images, characters, stories, and language. I’ve never been of the mindset that you have to move to Tibet to write about climbing Everest or live in a spooky mansion to write a horror story, but four months guiding in Alaska between drafts of *The Big Empty* was an invaluable experience.

I would return to the script reinvigorated and feeling like I couldn’t pack enough language into – what I had always envisioned as – the lean ninety-page script. However, as reinvigorating as spending one-hundred-twenty days strait in the Alaskan bush was, the most exciting moment of the summer – story wise – came in early June. Big news out

of a sleepy little lodge located a mile down the Naknek River from us. The owners of Naknek Rapids Camp – a lodge I boated past or flew over everyday – had been indicted for running drugs from Alaska to Texas in their company floatplane. I couldn't believe my luck.

## Chapter 8: Art Imitates Life Imitates Art

It's early June and the King Salmon are running. The floatplane's just dropped me off with a pair of clients deep in bear country on the Nushagak River. I'm rigging the boat when I run into my good buddy, Jazzy, who guides out of Rapids Camp Lodge. I ask him, "What's shaking?" He flips his head to a diminutive client snapping photos of the scenery and responds, "You mean, besides guiding Kix Brooks of Brooks & Dunn, and the fact that my boss is probably going to jail for forty years?" – another surreal day as an AK guide. This is the first I've heard about the Rapids Camp drug ring, and I spend the day lost in thought, thinking about the case, *The Big Empty*, and how I can't get the thing out fast enough (the writer's curse: it's all about you and your story).

In the ensuing weeks the case explodes and was all the buzz around Alaska. Allegedly, the owners of Rapids Camp Lodge had been using their DeHavilland Otter (the big brother of Seward's floatplane the DeHavilland Beaver) to run synthetic marijuana a.k.a. "spice" from Alaska to Texas in the offseason. The Feds stepped in indicting thirty-two defendants in the case (many of whom are pilots and guides – six having pleaded guilty since), and seizing massive amounts of land and assets – one of which was their drug running DeHavilland Otter which remained tethered to their dock all season (Klug 1).

What did this all mean for *The Big Empty*? I wasn't sure but I couldn't help but feel that, with a solid first draft in my back pocket and a promising second draft brewing, I was ahead of the ball. I had always been a firm believer in writing stories, which peak you as the writer's interest and never attempting to guess the market. On the rare



occasion, the market will fortuitously fall in line with what you are writing for yourself.

Who knows if drug running Alaskan bush pilots peaks the public's interest like it does mine, but I can't help but feel a story of this nature is being written somewhere in the wings and I have a head start on the pack.

## Chapter 9: Rewriting by Example

With the end of September came the close of the fishing and hunting season and my return to the lower forty-eight and two uninterrupted months of well thought out rewriting... or so I thought. Two days before my return, UT professor, Michener grad, and fellow Montana filmmaker and writer, Alex Smith, contacted me. Alex invited me to work on his new feature *Walking Out* being shot in Montana with preproduction beginning one short week away. Having gone out on a limb four months prior, I had asked Alex for a beer to talk making films and a living writing outside of LA, namely in Montana. Alex graciously shared a wealth of knowledge and told me he would keep me in mind for any future projects. I was grateful for his advice, but didn't hold out much hope for working on set when I had zero experience in the production realm. When the call came in to work on *Walking Out* as Key Set PA, Paramedic, and Outdoor Consultant – a film about hunters getting lost in Montana's Crazy Mountains – I knew it was an opportunity I couldn't pass up.

Despite working long days on set through the months of October and November, using the odd hours between 6pm and 5am to rewrite *The Big Empty*, I learned countless lessons about screenwriting, especially in my chosen genre, just by observing and being a part of the creative process. *Walking Out*, which inevitably deals with outdoor survival, harsh weather conditions, and wild animals, taught me what is worth keeping in a script like *The Big Empty* and what isn't worth the cost or the headache. I saw how certain written scenes translate well to the screen and why some fall flat and have to be adapted on the page. I was invited to craft a fly fishing and elk hunting scene and direct the actors

through those moments. Watching, listening, and learning each day on set motivated me to return home every night and work on *The Big Empty* applying any mistakes or moments of brilliance witnessed that day.

Some combination of great notes, stepping away from the story, field research of sorts, and working on *Walking Out* allowed for the smoothest, fastest, and perhaps the most productive rewrite I have ever been a part of. I enjoyed the process and look forward to taking *The Big Empty* another step further.

## Chapter 10: Launching The Big Empty

So what's next for *The Big Empty*...? Besides, the number of revisions, tweaks, and adjustments still to come as any written work is never truly finished, I have collaborated with an outdoor filmmaker to create a trailer or sizzle reel of sorts for *The Big Empty* to be used as a marketing tool. That summer while guiding, I was reunited with an old friend from my hometown of Whitefish, Montana who had created and built a successful fly fishing film company called Fly Out Media. Fly Out spent several weeks at our lodge shooting an Alaskan fly fishing film and during that duration the wheels began to turn.

I saw snippets of the extensive backlog of video Fly Out had shot around the Alaskan Bush – remote rivers, rarely seen wildlife, rugged mountains – remote country that most of the population has not and will never see. The type of breathtaking scenery that simply doesn't translate into words no matter how much you wish it would. I came to the realization that the best way to depict Alaska, in the way I was trying to relay in my script – the harsh beauty, the foreign culture, the inherent hazards – was by video. I sat down with Fly Out cofounder Cory Louma to discuss the potential of using their backlogged video of Alaska to build a trailer loosely around my script. Cory, who has been eager to transition Fly Out Media into the narrative world, was excited by the potential project and we set about piecing together a three-minute video built around a young, handsome guide/pilot – our Seward Saxon character – flying the audience through parts of the Alaskan Bush that, as mentioned, just don't translate into words. *The Big Empty* trailer moments are all there – hair raising flights, hard drinking guides, Inuit

ceremonies, stunning Northern Lights, a lot of wide open space – all, of course, set to the classic Johnny Cash tune “A Boy Named Sue.” If anything, the video was fun to make and exciting to see the story come to life a tad. Who knows if it will be an effective marketing tool to send out with the script when the time comes, but I do believe it is an innovative method for expressing the real strengths the screenplay and potential film have to offer. Without it I’m not sure many folks, outside of the world *The Big Empty* is built around, would really understand what it is they’re missing.

## Chapter 11: Patience is a Virtue

*The Big Empty* has progressed to a point that I am pleased with but not yet content. As with any artistic endeavor, a screenplay is never simply “done,” but taken to a place where any extra effort will either turn the product or your mind to mush. I still feel a spark of energy and excitement when thinking about passing back through *The Big Empty* and coloring every scene with better dialogue, detail, and character moments. That being said, I do feel like the major movements of the story are in place. It is the world and the characters that still need to be brought to life in some regard. That is the fun part and takes pass after pass of the script before every minute moment and character detail sings.

As of now, *The Big Empty* will live in the back of my mind for the next few months ruminating until I can’t bear to stay away from it any longer. It is with that patience that I’ve discovered some of my best writing, because the scenes have been playing out and polished in my head for months on end. All I have to do is put them down on paper at that point.

If I have learned anything from my enlightening two years at The University of Texas, it’s patience. Show great patience with your characters, story, writing, and career. All of it will come with time if you exercise a monastic sense of patience. Give yourself years to perfect a script, not months. Allow yourself decades to hit it big, not years. If you do so, good things are bound to happen. If you rush any aspect of your writing, not only will the product suffer, but you will drive yourself into an inescapable pit of despair.

## Appendices

### Appendix A – The Big Empty: Short Outline

01/27/2015

#### The Big Empty – Short Outline

*A wayward Alaskan bush pilot crash-lands in a remote Inuit village with a plane full of money and drugs.*

Nome, Alaska – 100 miles south of the Arctic Circle, 50 miles east of Siberia, and a thousand miles from nowhere. There's no place like Nome... Bush pilot and big-game guide, SEWARD SAXON, takes new client, MOSES FREEMAN, on the final hunt of the fall season. However, Moses ups Seward's rate to fly him across the Bering Strait to Russia where a drug deal gone wrong leads to three dead bodies, Moses marooned in Siberia, and Seward soaring away with a plane full of drugs and cash. Seward's floatplane – overloaded and crippled by gunfire – crash-lands off the shores of a tiny speck of land dotting the Strait.

Witness to the crash, Inuit huntress, FERNO EGOAK, pulls Seward from the icy waters and hurries him to the remote village of Diomedé. Meanwhile in Siberia, Moses tracks down his Russian counterpart, THE OLIGARCH, and pins the debacle on our unlucky pilot. The oligarch enlists the services of Siberian hitman, THE KROKODIL, to help Moses locate Seward, the money, and the drugs. Back in Diomedé, Seward licks his wounds, struggles to adapt to Inupiat culture, and bonds with Ferno, all while waiting for the Strait to freeze over. Minus a plane, Seward is at the mercy of the ice, which will

soon allow him to sled to the mainland with his newfound fortune. As winter closes on the Arctic and Seward's day of departure nears, Moses and The Krokodil discover the wreckage of Seward's downed plane.

Seward, who has grown mutually fond of the villagers – but mostly Ferno – decides he must confront Moses head-on rather than tuck-tail and run with the loot. In the end, Seward eliminates The Krokodil, puts away Moses once and for all, loses the money in the process, but – ultimately – finds a home with Ferno in the tiny village of Diomedé.



## Appendix B – The Big Empty: Filmography

01/27/2015

### The Big Empty – Filmography

- 1.) *Witness* (structure)
- 2.) *No Country for Old Men* (structure/antagonist)
- 3.) *Drive* (protagonist/love-story/structure/antagonist)
- 4.) *Cliffhanger* (tone/genre/protagonist)
- 5.) *Dances with Wolves* (structure/love-story/theme)
- 6.) *Never Cry Wolf* (setting/theme)
- 7.) *Mad Max* (protagonist/structure/tone)
- 8.) *Terminator* (antagonist)
- 9.) *Dear Lemon Lima* (setting)
- 10.) *Point Break* (tone/genre/protagonist)
- 11.) *The Great Waldo Pepper* (content)
- 12.) *The Grey* (bad example)

## Appendix C – The Big Empty: Getting to Know You

02/02/2015

### The Big Empty – Character Interviews

#### **SEWARD SAXON (30):**

**Q:** What do you want?

**A:** To be left alone.

**Q:** By whom?

**A:** Everyone.

**Q:** Why?

**A:** Because people bother me.

**Q:** Yes, but why do people bother you?

**A:** They just do. They're hypocritical and meddling and full of shit.

**Q:** All people are full of shit?

**A:** Basically.

**Q:** So you work at the lodge to get away from people?

**A:** Not necessarily. It started as an adventure, I guess... and to get away from my wife.

**Q:** Your wife?

**A:** Ex-wife, I should say.

**Q:** Did it work?

**A:** Hell, no. In this day in age there's no escaping, no disappearing. If someone wants to find you, they will. The notion of privacy, intrusiveness, and minding your own goddamn business is long gone.

**Q:** So you want to be a hermit?

**A:** A hermit?

**Q:** Live in the middle of Alaska somewhere, no one to bother you, eating squirrel and lichen for the rest of your days?

**A:** No, there aren't any girls in the middle of Alaska.

**Q:** Girls? So you don't want to be left totally alone?

**A:** It's not that I hate people, I'm just done pretending to like the one's I do hate.

**Q:** Whom do you hate?

**A:** Oh, I don't know, hate's a bit extreme... Karl Rove, I guess, and Kobe Bryant. It's more I'm tired of saying yes to everyone. I just want to be able to say, no, on occasion... Fuck no, in fact.

**Q:** Whom do you want to say "no" to?

**A:** Got a pen? My boss, my wife, my clients. The more people in your life, the more you have to answer to.

**Q:** So you're sick of people bossing you around, but you don't have the mental fortitude or desire to cut yourself off from humanity.

**A:** That's it in a nutshell.

**Q:** Sounds like you need to be your own boss?

**A:** I do.

**Q:** That's not so hard. Lots of people do it everyday.

**A:** People with money.

**Q:** What do you need money for?

**A:** To start a business.

**Q:** Yeah, but what kind of business?

**A:** One that involves planes. Planes don't run cheap, last time I checked.

**Q:** Do you want to run a lodge? Like what Kermit does?

**A:** Hell, no. I'm sick of the North.

**Q:** So, what then?

**A:** Head South.

**Q:** To where?

**A:** Nassau.

**Q:** Like, the Bahamas?

**A:** That's right. The way I see it, you buy up a little Cessna 180 with a set of floats and serve as an air taxi to all of the neighboring islands. Charge a couple hundred a head for a thirty-minute flight, run a dozen shuttles a day. You couldn't count the money fast enough. Grow from there.

**Q:** That's a pretty lofty enterprise, but how would the Bahamas be any different than Alaska?

**A:** What kind of question is that? It's warm, for one. Two, there's beautiful women and cheap beer. Three, everything down there isn't trying to kill you. Everything's slower. Life is simpler.

**Q:** For now.

**A:** How do you mean?

**Q:** What I mean is, yeah, you move down there and it's all beer and beaches and easy living, but at some point life is going to interject again. There's going to be girlfriends, and required engagements, and bills, and deaths, and so on. And you're going to be right back where you are now, only warmer.

**A:** I disagree.

**Q:** You don't think there's someone, somewhere in the world right now saying, "Everything would be different if I lived in Alaska." Hate to break it to you, but people think that everyday. I mean, isn't that what you thought before you moved to Alaska, when you were still in...?

**A:** Sacramento.

**Q:** Right. I mean, what forced you to escape California? What were you searching for then, that you aren't now?

**A:** My ex-wife, Britney, we envisioned very different lives for ourselves.

**Q:** Wasn't that something you discussed before you got married?

**A:** We didn't know what we wanted when we got married. Who the hell knows who they are, or what they want at nineteen? We were still growing, and we just happened to grow in different directions.

**Q:** What did she want for the two of you?

**A:** Security.

**Q:** Sounds comfortable.

**A:** Too comfortable.

**Q:** How'd you meet?

**A:** Out of high school. I was enrolled in flight school in Sac-town, and she was working toward being a dental hygienist. Brit had this grand plan that I'd end up flying for one of the big boys, she'd work in a little dental office on the side, and every weekend we'd jet somewhere new on the company dime.

**Q:** But you didn't want that?

**A:** I was nineteen. I wanted to get laid, and it sounded better than any of my other options, so I said yes and went along with it. Before I knew it I was flying right seat for Southwest, and coming home to a wife on weekends whose idea of adventure was a trip to the outlet malls to buy a bunch of useless crap and coo at the babies, all followed by dinner at The Olive Garden.

**Q:** So you made a change?

**A:** Hell, yeah, I made a change. I left. Packed up and headed for all points north. I mean it got to the point where we'd be descending on SMF and I'd secretly hope for a mechanical. A flame out over the river, or something.

**Q:** So you up and left your wife and moved to Alaska?

**A:** Don't say it like that. Why does everyone say it like that?

**Q:** Like what?

**A:** Like I'm the fucking bad guy. Our friends, her parents. She's the one who broke the rules.

**Q:** What rules?

**A:** When you get married you compromise on certain things. You agree on the way things are going to be. If someone goes back on the agreement, the deal's null and void.

**Q:** Like a contract?

**A:** You're goddamn right. And don't think I should feel bad for that, either. Marriage is a contract and she's the one who backed out, not me.

**Q:** So it's her fault?

**A:** I didn't say it was anyone's fault. All I mean to say is she wanted out just as bad as I did. She just didn't have the balls to do it.

**Q:** So how are things between you and your ex now?

**A:** Our arrangement's pretty one-way. As in I send her money her way and she takes it.

**Q:** Do you miss her?

**A:** Britney? Not yet.

**Q:** But you have to get lonely sometimes?

**A:** Sure, but I know guys who are married with three kids and get lonely. Are you married?

**Q:** I am.

**A:** And do you ever get lonely?

**Q:** Of course.

**A:** Right, so why do people act like marriage and kids is the end all to loneliness. And don't give me that "less-lonely" crap either. You're either lonely or you're not, there's no quantifying the matter.

**Q:** So you're not worried about finding your soul mate?

**A:** What does that even mean? Soul mate.

**Q:** You don't believe there's "the one" out there for you somewhere?

**A:** I believe there are lots of "ones" out there for me.

**Q:** Just not Britney?

**A:** Right. (laughs) Definitely not Britney. Let me put it to you this way, people claim they found their "one and only" next door, or in high school, or when they were six. Bullshit, man. Sure, they probably get along okay, but you're telling me they wouldn't have found someone equally compatible if they grew up in Calcutta? It's laughable.

**Q:** How about your parents?

**A:** What about them?

**Q:** Would they consider themselves soul mates?

**A:** Doubtful.

**Q:** What makes you say that?

**A:** Mom's dead and my dad's an asshole.

**Q:** That's terrible.

**A:** Which part?

**Q:** Both, I guess. When did your mom pass?

**A:** Few years ago. Right before me and Brit split.

**Q:** Before you started work with the lodge?

**A:** That's right.

**Q:** How would your mom have felt about your divorce and subsequent move to Alaska?

**A:** She always like Brit, thought she settled me down, so she would've been a pain in my ass about that. In terms of Alaska, it wouldn't even have been a conversation. The whole thing would have just gone over her head.

**Q:** Why do you say that?

**A:** You end up doing hair in Sacramento your whole damn life and you just start to lose perspective.

**Q:** Perspective of what?

**A:** Of what really matters?

**Q:** And what really matters?

**A:** To me?

**Q:** To you.

**A:** Wow... Family, I guess.

**Q:** But you have none, aside from your father who's an "asshole" – your words – and then there's you?

**A:** Family doesn't necessarily mean blood relation.

**Q:** True. Would you consider the guys at the lodge to be "family?"

**A:** Kermit's kind of like a dad in a lot of ways.

**Q:** Would you go to Kermit with girl problems, money issues, or major life choices?

**A:** No, probably not.

**Q:** Then, I hate to break it to you, he's not family.

**A:** What's your point?

**Q:** If a man who thinks family is what really matters in life, and he has no family, then what's his code?



**A:** His code?

**Q:** What does he have to live for?

**A:** I don't know? Fun, work, money.

**Q:** Most people work to make money and use money to have fun.

**A:** So?

**Q:** So, it's kind of all one thing.

**A:** Okay, fun then. I live for fun.

**Q:** And are you having fun?

**A:** What, right now?

**Q:** With life.

**A:** Am I having fun with life?

**Q:** That's right.

**A:** No, not particularly. But who said life was supposed to be fun, anyway?

**Q:** You did. Just now.

**A:** I guess I did.

**Q:** So you're not having any fun, and you don't have any family. What then?

**A:** Jesus, dude.

**Q:** Really, what do you have to live for at this point in your life?

**A:** Hope.

**Q:** Hope of what?

**A:** Everything we've been talking about. Hope to find love, start a family, find happiness.

**Q:** Is that what would make you happy? Love and family?

**A:** I think so.

**Q:** More than an air taxi service in the Bahamas?

**A:** Can I have both? Just kidding. Yeah, I think love and family – and I’m talking the genuine articles here – trumps all else.

**Q:** The good news is people discover both of those things everyday. The bad news is you’ve got to put yourself out there and stick with it. It’s hard to start a family if you’re bouncing around every six months.

**A:** My dad seemed to make pretty good work of it.

**Q:** Your dad, he was in and out?

**A:** More out than in.

**Q:** What did he do for work?

**A:** He was a pilot?

**Q:** Like you.

**A:** He’s nothing like me.

**Q:** I only meant –

**A:** He left in and out on me and my mom until I was five, then we never heard from him again. I may not be winning Mr. Congeniality anytime soon, but I haven’t come near touching anything to that dirt bag degree.

**Q:** But you left Britney?

**A:** That’s different. We didn’t have any kids.

**Q:** Why not?

**A:** Because I felt like I’d be lying to them.

**Q:** About what?

**A:** About life.

**Q:** What about life specifically.

**A:** That they were this unique, delicate flower that someday, with enough hard work and sacrifice, would grow taller than all the rest. You know, the same bullshit we were fed all our lives. I've sacrificed, man, I've struggled. Where's my shiny fucking medal?

**Q:** So you didn't want kids because you had a tough upbringing?

**A:** The deck just seemed too stacked against them from the beginning with me and Brit. I guess, deep down, I already knew I was out the door, and figured kids would only complicate the matter.

**Q:** What do you remember about your dad?

**A:** It's all pretty foggy now, and after the first few years of him being gone, mom stopped talking about him all together. I remember he flew forty-sevens for American out of DFW. Kind of a cowboy; said y'all, listened to country western, loved sports. There was a time in there when I idolized him. I used to get so excited when he'd pass through every couple of months. He'd take me to a Kings game, or drive out to the desert to pop shots at old beer cans. On the drive we'd listen to one of the old boys, Willie, Waylon, or Johnny, and he'd go drinking and rambling about Alaska.

**Q:** Alaska?

**A:** That's where he came up with the name Seward.

**Q:** Like William Seward? Guy who purchased Alaska?

**A:** Called it The Big Empty. Said a man get lost up there, and reinvent himself up there anyway he pleased.

**Q:** So did your dad ever make it up to Alaska?

**A:** Not that I know of. Last I heard he American let him go for drinking on the job. Later I got wind he was running sightseeing tours over the Grand Canyon.

**Q:** Not very glamorous.

**A:** No, but then he never was.

**Q:** Does you being an Alaska bush pilot have something to do with fulfilling your dad's dream for him?

**A:** Absolutely not. I think as I got older I realized he wasn't the hero I had built him up to be as a little kid. He was an ambitionless drunk philandering cowboy. At some point at I said, I didn't pick up, but I'm better than you, and I'm going to do what you never could. And I did.

**Q:** You certainly did, but still you followed in his footsteps by becoming a pilot and then fulfilled his life long dream by flying the Alaskan bush. I feel like both of those facts would make your dad exceptionally proud. Was that your intent?

**A:** Listen, I enrolled in flight school because college wasn't in the books for a number of reasons. Basically it boiled down to, I liked to skateboard and it would be easier to find empty swimming pools to skate in from the air. Simple as that, nothing Freudian about it. As far as flying the Alaskan bush, I guess something about hearing Alaska pitched as the final, final frontier, as a place you could start anew, stuck with me all these years, so that when I needed a change it jumped forth from the depths of my psyche.

**Q:** Favorite sports team?

**A:** Kings.

**Q:** Most disliked team?

**A:** Lakers and the Jazz.

**Q:** Favorite band?

**A:** Chili Peppers, Rage, Sublime, all good.

**Q:** Most hated band?

**A:** U2 or Jethro Tull. Flute rock sucks.

**Q:** Favorite aircraft?

**A:** DeHavilland Beaver. Workhorse of the sky.

**Q:** Do you like to hunt?

**A:** I like to fish.

**Q:** But what about hunting?

**A:** I think I used to. Now it's just a job and that kind of sucks the fun and meaning out of a thing.

**Q:** What do you mean you “think” you used to?

**A:** I can’t really remember a time when I was hunting growing up thinking, “Wow, I’m really having a blast killing this rabbit or duck or deer.” Don’t get me wrong, I did it a lot, but all those memories seemed to be steeped in sadness, rather than fondness.

**Q:** What do you think of the Inuit?

**A:** You mean the Eskimos? I’ve got nothing against them. Don’t really know too many, but the one’s who stick around Nome seem to congregate around the bar and don’t work too often.

**Q:** Would you date one?

**A:** Would I date an Eskimo? Haven’t seen too many that I’d classify as “dateable” but, sure, I’d give it a go.

**FERNO EGOAK (25):**

**Q:** What do you want?

**A:** What do you mean?

**Q:** What is it you want most in life more than anything else?

**A:** I have everything I want.

**Q:** You don't want, say, a million dollars?

**A:** What would I do with a million dollars?

**Q:** You tell me.

**A:** Mmm. Boat needs a new outboard.

**Q:** What about children? You don't want kids?

**A:** I already have enough mouths to feed.

**Q:** Is that a no?

**A:** No.

**Q:** No, it's not a no?

**A:** It's more complicated than that.

**Q:** What complicates things.

**A:** Finding a husband for one.

**Q:** What about the men in the village?

**A:** Dio's a pretty small island, you know? Also, the men in the village are either young boys or old men. Most of the men my age go to work on the mainland. Send money back to their families. They don't come round too much. Those that do stay home seem to get stuck on the booze pretty bad.

**Q:** Sounds like pretty slim pickings.

**A:** I've enough on my plate as it. Don't need no man mucking things up.

**Q:** What do you have on your plate? What keeps you so busy?

**A:** Taking care of Grandma. Providing for the village. Up every morning, hunting, fishing, trapping.

**Q:** Do you like what you do?

**A:** I don't know, I just do it. It's my job. Everyone's got a job.

**Q:** I mean, are you happy with what you do?

**A:** Sure, I like it okay. Beats working in a cannery.

**Q:** Okay, so if a cannery would be the worst job in the world for you, what would be the best job?

**A:** I can't think of ever doing anything else besides what I do now.

**Q:** So you're working your dream job right now. Very few people in the world can say that. That's pretty special.

**A:** It doesn't feel very special stalking the sea ice on a thirty below day.

**Q:** I'll bet. So how did you come to be the provider for the family?

**A:** It was down to either me or Grandma. Was a pretty obvious choice.

**Q:** What about your mother or your father? What happened to them?

**A:** They passed.

**Q:** No siblings?

**A:** A brother. He passed too.

**Q:** Your whole family is gone?

**A:** I've still got Gran.

**Q:** What happened to the rest of them?

**A:** Went through the ice. It happens here.

**Q:** How old were you?

**A:** Little. Maybe six or seven. It happened after the freeze. My brother he had seizures. Caught one, that wouldn't quit. Mom and Dad left me with Grandma and took him across the Strait to Wales on the mainland.

**Q:** And what happened?

**A:** They never made it. Went through the ice, I imagine. Like I said, that's been known to happen here.



## Appendix D – The Big Empty: A Treatment

02/09/2015

### The Big Empty –Treatment

#### Act I

A diminutive DeHavilland Beaver floatplane (glorified tin can with wings) buzzes through Alaska's rugged Brooks Mountain Range. The plane's steely pilot, SEWARD SAXON (30), wrestles the yoke, navigating a narrow gauntlet of towering granite walls. A HEAVYSET HOUSTONIAN (50) rides shotgun – literally – rifle slung across his lap, scanning the tundra for... a lone grey wolf galloping across the scrubby valley floor. As the Houstonian sets his sights on the unfairly marked animal, Seward jerks the yoke, rocking the plane, sending the hunter's shot wildly off its mark. The wolf escapes unscathed, much to the dismay of Seward's disgruntled passenger.

At day's end, Seward and the Houstonian return to home base – a luxurious hunting lodge set in a remote northwest corner of the Alaskan bush. Surrounded by trophy animals of all variety, a gathering of big-game guides and uber-wealthy clients sip bourbon and share the day's "war stories." The Heavyset Houstonian, annoyed with the day's lack of success and his disenchanting guide, needles Seward about Alaska being a refuge for those shirking responsibility and the rigors of "real life." The Texan's rash generalization perhaps hits a little too close to home, however, as it spurs Seward toward a night of heavy drinking and in search of a quick piece of ass with one of the lodge's servers – who promptly shuts the drunk pilot down.

The following morning, Seward limps into KERMIT (65), the lodge owner's office, and, big surprise, the Houstonian has stiffed Seward on the tip. The fall season has nearly come and gone and, yet, Seward is still flat broke. Alimony is bleeding him dry, and he isn't even close to buying that personal plane of his. Seward, simply put, needs cash and quick. He begs Kermit to pair him with the biggest swinging dick for the final hunt of the season, and Kermit reluctantly consents. Seward is to pick up his new client, NYC mogul Moses Freeman, at the nearby Nome airport later that morning.

Seward awaits the arrival of a private Learjet and welcomes the fancy plane's equally decadent white passenger whose only piece of luggage is a *Gucci carry-on* – this is going to be a long last day. Upon greeting the man, Seward realizes this is in fact ROCCO (35), assistant to the plane's black pilot, and Seward's new client, MOSES FREEMAN (45) – a cheery Liberian nation with a penchant for all things Americana: airplanes, automatic weapons, and, most of all, Johnny Cash. Moses ignores Seward's slip-up, and is quick to embrace him, once realizing they are to be guided by none other than, "A boy named *Sue*."

After a quick run through of the DeHavilland Beaver's safety equipment – *survival bag* and *ELT* (Emergency Locator Transmitter – switch to be activated in case of crash) – Seward, Moses, and Rocco take flight in search of moose. After the early part of the day's hunt yields no results, Moses suggests they look further east. Seward jokes that

if they flew any further east they'd be in Russia. Moses insists there are big moose over there. Seward asks, "How big?" Moses replies, "900 *kilos*..." Seward, well aware of the ramifications for flying over international boundary waters and in full knowing that no moose weighs close to two thousand pounds, nervously responds, "That's a lot of *meat*." Moses offers to make it worth Seward's while and pays him ten times his daily rate. Seward, unable to turn down the cash in hand, takes the offer. **(Catalyst)**

Tensions are high as Seward shuttles Moses and Rocco through a soupy fogbank to Russia. The first winter westerly is settling in on the Strait and soon the door to get back home will slam closed. Moses guides Seward to a remote Siberian cove where nothing but pine trees and a single luxury SUV line the bank. Seward counts the seconds from the cockpit as Moses does business with two RUSSIAN THUGS on land, and Rocco stuffs the plane's hull with a set of anonymous duffels. Once loaded, Rocco asks Seward to hand him *the bag*. Seward reaches for Moses' *Gucci carry-on*, but Rocco stops him gesturing to the other bag – the plane's *survival bag*. Seward tries to correct him, but Rocco insists and returns to the Russians onshore with the survival kit in hand. After a quick handshake and exchange of the bag, Rocco pulls a gun and executes one of the Russians leading to a flurry of gunfire between the three remaining men. The sole survivor of the firefight, Moses, trudges back to the plane with gun in hand. Terrified by what he has just witnessed, Seward guns the engine and begins a slow taxi away from shore. Moses slogs through the water, nearing the plane, and, just as Seward gains enough speed to buzz away, Moses pops off several shots into the body of the Beaver.

Seward fights the crippled plane and escalating storm over the Strait, but dropping oil pressure and whiteout conditions force Seward to abandon his course toward a tiny spec of land dotting the Bering Sea on his radar. To complicate matters, while in flight, Seward flips open the *Gucci carry-on* sitting beside him to reveal stacks upon stacks of shrink-wrapped hundred dollar bills. Unable to revel in his newfound fortune, turbulence jolts the plane and Seward snaps the case closed, descending toward the flat-topped volcanic island of Little Diomed.

Dense fog obscures Seward's landing as he touches down along the island's rugged shoreline but an *outcropping of rocks* appear unavoidably through the mist, clipping the Beaver's propeller and sending the tiny plane cartwheeling end-over-end. As the plane slips below the icy waters of the Bering Sea, Seward struggles to free himself from the wreckage but his leg is pinned between the plane's crumpled frontend. As the busted Beaver settles on the bottom of the ocean floor – sixty feet down – Seward slips into unconsciousness, only to be pried from the wreckage by an Inuit huntress, FERNO EGOAK (25), at the last minute. Ferno hurries a half-frozen Seward back to her village of Diomed. **(Turning Point #1)**

## Act II

Back in Siberia, Moses drives the dead drug dealers' SUV into a nearby post-Soviet hamlet. There, Moses phones his Russian counterpart and drug czar, THE OLIGARCH (55)... there's been a problem.

Winter has arrived with the previous night's westerly. Snow blankets Diomedes and ice rings the island, ever expanding outward toward the Alaskan mainland. Seward awakes from a deep sleep, under a mound of sealskins, with a busted leg and being tended to by an ancient Inuit woman and Ferno's grandmother, CLOTILDA EGOAK (70). As Seward's memory fails him, in walks Ferno and the pieces of the crash, his subsequent rescue, and the bag of money begin to fall into place. Seward, glancing around, inquires about the location of his "suitcase." Ferno jokingly apologizes for being unable to rescue Seward's luggage from the bottom of the Bering Sea. Seward lurches out of bed, but his injured leg collapses under the weight. Ferno and Clo help Seward back to bed and inform him that all he can do for now is to rest and eat his weight in *muktuk*.

Moses is carted to Russia's easternmost hub city of Dehznay, where he meets with The Oligarch himself. Inside the drug czar's palatial home, Moses spins the story of Seward shanghaiing the crew, killing Rocco and the Russians, and making off with the millions in drugs and cash. The Oligarch – picking up on foul play and making Moses look like Mother Teresa – informs the Liberian National that it's either his money back or Moses' head. In order to hedge his bets and keep tabs on the situation, The Oligarch assigns Moses with just the man to help track down this, "Boy named Sue."

The Oligarch's goons enter a dilapidated Soviet flophouse to roundup, THE CROCODILE (35), a muscle-bound drug addict covered head-to-toe with *scaly sores* (hence, the name) from the new Russian super drug Moses and The Oligarch are pedaling, *Krokodil* – a desomorphine based opiate, both cheaper and more potent than heroin, but has lasting zombie-like psychotropic effects and, literally, rots the body from the inside out.

Back on Diomedes, Seward gradually regains his strength but his injured leg continues to keep him under house arrest. Growing stronger and more restless by the day, Seward snoops around the Egoak compound and discovers an old rickety snowmachine. Tries the ignition to no avail and then pops the hood to find a rodent's nest where the engine should be. Clotilda catches Seward hobbling around and puts him to work with her for the day: sewing sealskin, smoking salmon, and feeding sled dogs. Time spent confined together allow Seward and Clotilda to grow more comfortable with one another, but Ferno – who, minus a patriarch, is the provider for the tiny family unit, the hunter – remains icy toward their most unwelcome guest. Ferno, upon her return from the day's hunt, immediately cuts Seward down, who – for once – is proud of his honest day's work. Ferno accuses Seward of being a *gussak* (lazy white man) who stays home performing womanly duties instead of hunting and providing for the village. Seward defends himself, claiming he made his living as a hunter back home. Ferno scoffs at the fact, citing that gussaks don't know how to hunt, only how to kill.

Early the next morning, Seward drags himself out of bed eager to prove himself to Ferno. Reluctantly, Ferno allows Seward to join her for the day's seal harvest. Seward and Ferno mush out onto the sea ice ringing Diomedes to stalk *seal breathing holes* (openings in the ice that are patterned in a distinct line along the sea shelf every few hundred feet). Seward is humbled by the archaic intricacies and patience involved with Inuit hunting as he fails time after time. Seward's failure, and subsequent embarrassment, begins to crack Ferno's icy demeanor toward their gussak guest. Ferno takes the time to orient Seward on the location of the little island – smack dab between the Alaskan mainland in the far distance before them, and the Russian mainland behind. Seward glances nervously over his shoulder toward...

Meanwhile, back in Dehzev, Moses and The Crocodile load into a plane provided by The Oligarch and bid goodbye to Siberia.

Perched before a breathing hole, spear in hand, Seward notices the distinct *outcropping of rocks* he crashed his DeHavilland Beaver into a week ago. Seward nonchalantly inquires if they're nearby where the plane went down. Ferno informs him that it's about sixty feet below their feet. Right then, a seal rears its cute little head out of the breathing hole. Seward hesitates and misses the easy shot by a wide margin – perhaps, intentionally – but the “poor” throw greatly amuses the topnotch hunter Ferno.

After the long day's hunt, Ferno repacks the dogsled for the mush back home, and Seward remarks on what looks like a “bazooka” tucked in the gear pile. Ferno explains that it's a *harpoon gun with an explosive head*. Seward jokingly asks if they hunt “Arctic elephant” with it, to which Ferno casually replies, “*Arveq...Whale.*” Seward balks at the idea of killing a whale, which upsets Ferno. Ferno defends her people and Yupik culture, citing the fact that gussaks like Seward kill bears, moose, wolves, caribou – you name it – just the same back on the mainland... and from airplanes, no less. A single whale, on the other hand, is enough to sustain the whole village for an entire winter. Seward assures her there is a difference shooting a moose and killing a whale, but can't seem to put it into words... “You just don't kill whales, that's why.” They couldn't be further apart on the issue. The culture clash is as apparent as ever as Ferno and Seward mush home in silence.

Somewhere in the air between Siberia and Alaska, Moses and The Crocodile buzz the vast expanse of icy blue water. Moses scans the Strait while The Crocodile shoots up. They ride in a similarly tense silence as the man they're in search of. It is clear these two won't become best friends anytime soon. Moses remarks on the hopelessness of the method, and calls off the search. The Crocodile, per usual, doesn't say much at all.

Dinner that night at the Egoak's is excruciating. Clotilda tries to break the silence by asking about the day's hunt, which spurs Seward to make an underhanded comment about their earlier argument. Ferno excuses herself to bed early. Clo, sensing something's off, shoots Seward a glare and follows after her granddaughter, leaving Seward to stew in his guilt.

Seward lays awake that night while back in Nome, Moses and the Crocodile touch their plane down on the frozen lake before Kermit's, now buttoned up, hunting lodge...

Bright and early the next morning, Ferno kicks Seward awake. Seward asks, reiterating something Ferno said earlier, that he thought gussaks weren't fit to hunt. Ferno replies they're not hunting, they're fishing... even the women and children fish.

Back at the hunting lodge, Moses and the Crocodile put the screws to Kermit. Kermit insists he hasn't seen or heard from Seward since he last saw him with Moses. Kermit jokes that maybe Seward joined the Eskimos and is living in an igloo somewhere. The Crocodile doesn't see the humor in it and, for the first time, we're witness to his cold cruelty – which horrifies even the likes of Moses.

In contrast to the horror happening in Nome, the whole village is out to gillnet salmon in Diomedes. We see the Yupik people in their industrious societal roles: men (plus Ferno) set and clear the nets, women (plus Seward – bad leg; can't go out on boats yet) clean the fish, children hang the fillets on smoking poles, and sled dogs eat the innards. It is a busy, collaborative, and happy affair. The old Yupik woman Seward works beside is charmed by the helpful gussak, which Ferno takes note of, and Seward can't help but admire Ferno's abilities as a provider and pivotal member of the community (setup her *biting through fishing line* and eating fresh fish eggs). Seward and Ferno exchange glances throughout the day.

At the end of a long, wet, slimy day, the village has warmed to Seward and invite him to the annual Yupik carnival, being held that night, meant to celebrate the catch and pray for the winter beluga migration – a single pod of Belugas swim past Diomedes for a very small window every November. Seward is humbled by the invitation but tells Ferno he'll only go if she wants him there. She says it would please Clotilda.

The winter carnival that night is all fun and games, literally. Surrounding a massive bonfire there are a number of Eskimo games: four-man carry, ear pull, high kick, and the *nalukataq* (blanket toss). The disdainful tension between Seward and Ferno has been replaced by sexual tension, as they seem to circle around one another all night. While watching the blanket toss, villagers urge Seward and Ferno to give it a try. Reluctantly they agree and have a blast – like two kids bouncing on a trampoline.

Following the blanket toss, out of breath and love hungry, Ferno notices a change in the sky and tells Seward that "it's" beginning and to follow her. Seward chases Ferno (lags behind but leg is beginning to show signs of healing), scrambling up the steep barren slope of the tiny volcanic island. At Diomedes's squared-off summit, they sit and watch as the world's most magnificent light show begins – Aurora Borealis, "The Northern Lights." Seward and Ferno finally kiss under the swirling vortex of greens, blues, pinks, and purples. Steamy sealskin lingerie sex scene ensues. **(Midpoint)**

Back at the hunting lodge, we see the aftermath of The Crocodile's cruel handiwork on Kermit – only a shell of the feisty old codger remains. He begs Moses and The Crocodile to believe him that he doesn't know where Seward is. That Seward probably crashed out in the storm and is at the bottom of the Strait somewhere. This bit of information jogs Moses' memory about the safety talk Seward gave him before their takeoff that one fateful day, specifically about the *ELT* (Emergency Locator Transmitter) to be activated in case of a crash. Moses asks Kermit where in the lodge the plane's ELT

transmits too. Kermit's face blanks as he, and now Moses, knows this is their only shot at finding Seward in the Big Empty.

Seward awakens the next morning to find Ferno missing from bed, and just as he begins to feel self-conscious, she explodes into the bedroom announcing that the belugas are here.

The whole village is in a frenzy as everyone (men, women, children, elderly) man their station much in the same fashion as salmon fishing, but it is apparent that the whale harvest holds much more importance as it is the village's primary source of sustenance for the long winter months ahead. Ferno kisses Seward – who is still restricted to land because of his bum leg – and instructs him to follow the whaling party along on the ice with her dogsled. The whaling party motors out into the web of ice and open water to split a single whale off from the herd. The entire village serves as a mobile butchery, plodding along behind the whalers on land, ready to clean and dress the whale when needed. Seward mushes ahead, keeping pace with the whaling party on the ice. The whalers drive a single Beluga toward land, but the whale dives under a sheet of ice, blocking the boats and losing its hunters. The whale resurfaces in narrow channel of open water alongside Seward, singling him out. Ferno calls to Seward from her boat to use the “harpoon.” Seward remembers the *harpoon gun with exploding head* tucked away in the dogsled. With the whole village watching, relying on the gussak, Seward pushes the dogs after the whale, chasing it down, and gaining ground. Seward pulls ahead of the beluga and loads the harpoon. He takes aim as the massive creature cruises by, so close he can nearly touch it, but Seward can't take the shot. The whale rolls past, escaping the narrow spit of water, back to the safety of the open ocean and rejoining the pod. Seward has single-handedly put the survival of the entire village in jeopardy. The look on Ferno's face says it all.

Back in the hunting lodge's hangar, Kermit, Moses and The Crocodile stand before a silent radar screen. The unnerving silence and worried look on Kermit's face tells us that there is no activity and, therefore, Seward didn't activate his ELT – whether intentionally or unintentionally, they don't know. The Crocodile states that without an ELT signal, there is no chance of locating Seward, which means both Kermit and Moses no longer serve a purpose and prepares to shoot them. Moses and Kermit, united by fear of death, plead for the Crocodile to give it time. Kermit makes the point that there's a massive front moving across the Strait as they speak that could be blocking the signal. At least give it until morning. The Crocodile consents but doesn't take the gun off of them.

Outside the little Diomed town hall a winter storm rages, inside the town hall the villagers rage. An emergency meeting has been called to sort out how the Yupik villagers will survive the winter without their primary supply of *muktuk* (whale blubber). As villagers argue around him, Seward sits with his head hung like he's on trial. Questions circle around him, “How will they survive the winter?” “The beluga pod has moved further south to winter breeding grounds until the spring.” “With this latest storm, the Strait will be frozen over by morning.” “What to do with the gussak?” Tempers boil over to the point where a mob begins to rear its ugly head. Villagers spit on and assault

Seward. Despite her supreme disappointment, Ferno steps in between Seward and the mob and tells him to go home. Seward slips out by the skin of his teeth.

Ferno returns home later that night after quelling the mob. Seward tries to explain to Ferno, but anything between them appears to be long gone. Ferno coldly explains that the Strait will be solid enough to travel across after the storm passes. She'll sled Seward to Alaskan mainland first thing in the morning, before he can do anymore damage.

Another sleepless night on Diomed, as Seward tosses in bed thinking of Ferno, the village, and the money... He can't take it anymore, and tears out of bed. In the middle of the night, Seward creeps out into the raging storm and harnesses Ferno's whimpering dogs to the sled – even they don't want to be out in this weather. Seward fights the whiteout conditions as he mushes out onto the Strait until he reaches the distinct *outcropping of rocks* where his plane went down. Upon locating the *seal breathing hole* they hunted earlier, Seward tethers a rope to the dogsled, strips bear in the blinding cold, and dives through the opening with rope in hand. Seward slips into a kind of eerie stillness below the ice as he swims downward toward his sunken plane. Fighting the cold and lack of oxygen, Seward squeezes into the plane's tiny cockpit and wrestles the *Gucci carry-on* from the wreckage. However, as Seward pushes off of the plane's control panel for a quick exit, he steps on and activates the *red ELT switch* – unbeknownst to him. Seward claws upward through the freezing water, nearing the surface when his body fails, cramping and contorting him into a slowly sinking ball of tensed muscle. Seward summons his last bit of strength and oxygen to tug on the rope, dragging the sled and dogs backwards, toward the opening in the ice. The dogs spook as they near the water and take off running, ripping Seward upward and out of the sea like Aquaman with *Gucci carry-on* in tow.

Kermit nods off seated beside Moses as they watch the ever-silent radar screen. Seated alongside them, The Crocodile continues to train the gun on them but it begins to drop as he fades to sleep as well. Moses looks to make a move when the radar screen PINGS, picking up a signal, and jolting everyone awake. Kermit studies the screen and the ELT's location. With mixed emotions he confirms that it's Seward all right, and it looks like he's out on Little Diomed somewhere. Moses asks, "How close?" to which Kermit responds, less than an hour. Moses moves to the largest plane in the hangar's fleet – a twin turboprop – to cut through the storm, and drags Kermit along with to guide them in to Diomed. Moses fires up the twin props, ready to takeoff, realizing they're missing a party, right as the Crocodile drives a *snowmachine* up the back ramp of the transport plane. They lift off into the storm.

Seward, dressed and nearly thawed out, looks at the faint outline of the Alaskan mainland before him, through the breaking storm, and the quiet village of Diomed behind him. There is nothing there for him anymore. Seward pushes the dogs across the frozen Bering Strait for Alaska. **(Turning Point #2)**

### Act III

Before sunrise, Ferno awakes at the Egoak home and knocks on Seward's bedroom door, perhaps looking to apologize for the night prior, but Seward is nowhere to be found...

Seward mushes the dogs toward the mainland, growing ever closer to his new, filthy rich freedom, but keeps glancing back over his shoulder. Far above him, Seward hears the unmistakable hum of a plane. Seward stops the sled and gazes up. Little more than a blinking light against the dark sky, the plane cruises in the direction of Diomed. Seward knows it could be anyone, but his guilt and worry get the better of him and he swings the sled around mushing back toward Diomed.

As day breaks, Moses cruises the twin turboprop toward that unmistakable flat-topped volcanic island. The Crocodile asks Kermit if what they see is Diomed, and Kermit says he'd bet his life on it. Satisfied, the Crocodile calmly opens the plane's door and shoves Kermit out. Off of Moses' horrified look, the Crocodile proclaims Kermit to have been "*dead weight*." Moses knows better than to protest with this monster – there's no controlling him at this point – and veers the plane toward Diomed.

Ferno's ready to explode after learning that, not only is Seward gone, but he has taken off with her dogs and sled as well. Right then, the deafening roar of a twin turboprop buzzes overhead and lands in the village.

Ferno, Clotilda, and the rest of the village go to meet the plane as Moses and the Crocodile disembark, inquiring about the whereabouts of a white pilot who came through Diomed some weeks ago. Wary of the strange men, the villagers all slowly and silently look to Ferno for an answer.

Seward charges the dogsled back in the direction of Diomed as sunlight spills onto the ice.

Back in Diomed, Ferno and the villagers still haven't said a peep. Despite the indignation they harbor for Seward, they aren't about to serve him up to these strange men. Sick of waiting, The Crocodile puts a gun to head of the ancient Yupik woman standing next to him, Clotilda, spurring Ferno to speak up. Ferno mentions that, while hunting, she saw a floatplane go down on the other side of the island about the time they're talking. In regards to the gussak pilot, she wouldn't know, there weren't any survivors. Moses instructs Ferno to take them to the crash site.

Ferno guides Moses and The Crocodile out to the familiar *outcropping of rocks* that initially sunk the plane. After locating the *seal breathing hole* above the submerged Beaver, Moses trains the gun on Ferno and tells her to strip... Moses instructs Ferno to go fetch his money, and tells the Crocodile to dive down, as well, and make sure Seward is dead. If Seward isn't there, Ferno dies.

Seward speeds the dogs back toward Diomed but the little island still looms in the near distance.

Stripped bear, Ferno ties off a piece of fishing line to the snowmachine and plunge through the hole into the sea, quickly followed by the Crocodile. Moses waits on



the surface as, below, Ferno swims the fishing line downward, unspooling it as she travels, leading The Crocodile toward the wreckage.

On the surface, Moses hugs himself in the cold, waiting impatiently, when a dogsled pulls up in the near distance and stops short. Moses and the anonymous – Inuit in appearance – musher match gaze for tense beat, locked in standoff.

Beneath the ice, Ferno and The Crocodile near the wreckage of the plane. Obviously knowing Seward isn't going to be there, Ferno – in one quick motion – brings the fishing line to her mouth and *bites* off their guideline. The Crocodile, in a panic, thrashes to locate the clear, *invisible* monofilament fishing line in the swirling ocean water. Unable to do so, he looks back to Ferno who is swimming away into the darker depths of the ocean, quick as a seal. Not knowing where she is going, and lacking the oxygen to follow, the Crocodile swims straight upward in search of air.

Still locked in gaze with the suspicious musher, the previously taut fishing line in tethered to the snowmachine goes limp, distracting him. He reels in the line, hand-over-hand, cursing like a fisherman who has just lost the lunker of a lifetime. Pulling the last of the line in empty handed, Moses glances up and sees the suspicious musher racing away toward the nearby *outcropping of rocks*. Now knowing it to be Seward, Moses hops on the snowmachine and guns the engine, chasing after.

Underwater, The Crocodile scrambles upward and collides with a three-foot thick ceiling of solid arctic ice. He pushes, punches, and kicks at the barrier, clawing along it in search of the opening. Eventually his movements slow and his last breath leaks from him, leaving him dead under the sea ice.

Meanwhile, Ferno swims as fast as she can, following the island's *sea shelf*, knowing there's another seal breathing hole if she can only make it the few hundred feet down the line. She strains to hold her breath the last few feet, muscles slowing, cramping, when she bursts through the opening and throws herself on the ice shivering and half-frozen.

Unbeknownst to Seward that Ferno is freezing to death less than a mile away, he charges the dogsled toward the outcropping of rocks – the only cover on the blank canvas of ice for miles – with Moses and his 250 horsepower sled quickly eating up the distance between and popping off increasingly closer gunfire.

Upon reaching the rocks, Seward and Moses have a standoff from either side of the volcanic formation. Seward's trapped without a gun, and he and Moses both know it. Moses slowly moves in for the kill when Seward remembers, tucked away in the dogsled, the *harpoon gun with exploding head*. At the last second, Seward grabs the gun, swings it around on Moses and, this time, he is able to take the shot, blowing Moses to smithereens! **(Climax)**

In the distance, Seward sees Ferno's figure staggering across the ice. When Seward reaches Ferno she is nearly unconscious. He tucks her in the sled and rushes her back to Diomedea. During the trip back, Ferno passes out from hypothermia.

When Ferno wakes – presumably days later – Seward is gone. Clotilda informs her that after bringing her back, Seward promptly took the turboprop plane and left. Days go by without word from Seward as Ferno regains her strength and gets back into the

routine of village life. Ferno is a little down in the mouth, however, missing Seward and worrying about the survival of her people through the long winter.

Just when she thinks she may never hear from Seward again, he arrives in his *new plane*(?) stock loaded with food and supplies for the village – having spent much of the money on a winter’s supply of rations... and with enough left over to buy himself a plane. Reunited with Ferno and the Yupik people, Seward’s finally found a home on the little island of Diomedé.

*\*\*This last paragraph is honestly what I’m having the most trouble with. I’m not sure what to do with the falling action, in terms of, does Seward get what he WANTS (\$), NEEDS (love – Ferno), or some combination of both? I feel like Seward does have to somehow come through with food for the village, because, even though he has defeated Moses, the people of Diomedé are still royally screwed for the winter because Seward didn’t shoot the whale. Curious on everyone’s thoughts on how to create a satisfying action/adventure type ending here without going too sappy.*

## Appendix E – The Big Empty: Full Outline

02/23/2015

### The Big Empty – Outline

RED SLUGLINES = turning points

BLUE SLUGLINES = returns to A-story

#### ACT I

EXT. BROOKS MOUNTAINS - AERIAL - DAY

Floatplane buzzes through a rugged mountain range.

INT. PLANE - DAY

SEWARD flies plane (wears a beard to mask his boyish good looks -- in a place where they aren't much value -- but it only makes him ruggedly handsome). HOUSTONIAN (outline of Texas stretches across his shirt. The Lone Star State has never looked bigger) holds rifle, looking for...

EXT. TUNDRA - DAY

A magnificent SHE-WOLF leads a pack of arctic greys (two cubs flanking her sides) fleeing the plane.

INT. PLANE - DAY

Seward banks away, diving the plane toward...

EXT. TUNDRA - DAY

Plane buzzes the pack, calving the she-wolf off from herd.

INT. PLANE - DAY

Seward holds plane level as Houstonian shoots she-wolf. "Yeehaw! Smoke a pack a day!"

EXT. HUNTING LODGE - DAY

Floatplane touches down on lake before luxurious lodge.

I

#### NT. LODGE - GREAT ROOM - NIGHT

Close on “ferocious” pouncing wolf. Seward drinks, staring at the frozen creature mounted in place. Clients, KERMIT, and guides share stories surrounded by every trophy animal Alaska has to offer. Seward makes eyes at IN-HOUSE GIRL pouring drinks. Conversation with Houstonian turns to Alaska being a refuge for those shirking responsibility and the rigors of “real life.” Spurs Seward to take a big slug of bourbon.

#### EXT. LODGE - EMPLOYEE HOUSING - NIGHT

Seward stumbles down lakeshore, bottle in hand, dead drunk. Pounds on cabin door. In-house girl answers. It’s made clear that this is their usual arrangement but Seward is too drunk and she’s had enough of him. Turns Seward away and tells him to sleep it off. Seward throws rocks at cabin, breaks window.

#### INT. LODGE - KERMIT’S OFFICE - DAY

Next morning, Seward hungover in Kermit’s office. Kermit informs Seward he’s paying for the window, and he got stiffed by the Houstonian, AND he’s on deck duty for the last day of the season. Seward flips. He’s broke, owes alimony, and about to be homeless (just learned wife got the house in the divorce). He needs money and fast. Pleads with Kermit to pair him with a big wig for the final day. Kermit relents. Pickup new client and Frisco bigwig, Moses Freeman, at the Nome Airport later that morning.

#### EXT. NOME AIRPORT - DAY

Seward watches luxurious Learjet land (Setup disdain for “Skimos” somewhere at Nome airport). Greets affluent white passenger (we learn to be ROCCO -- Moses’ “bagman”) carrying a GUCCI CARRY-ON as Mr. Freeman, when the plane’s black pilot and real MOSES FREEMAN strolls up. Moses loves all things America (having been ingrained with American culture growing up in Liberia) -- combustible engines, guns, and, most of all, Johnny Cash. Makes “Boy Named Sue” reference to Seward. Moses is instantly a fan of Seward -- Rocco, not so much.

#### EXT. LODGE - DOCK - DAY

Three men load into floatplane. Rocco always keeping the Gucci bag tight by his side. Seward catches sight of Rocco’s .44 mag strapped to his side as he loads into the plane. “What’s with the four-four?” “Bear gun.” “In that case, you may want to file off the front sight.” “Why’s that?” “So it won’t hurt so much when the bear shoves it up your ass.” Moses loves it, Rocco hates it (Rocco and Seward almost instantly dislike one another), and pistol is setup.

#### INT. FLOATPLANE - DAY

Seward runs through his abbreviated preflight talk. In case of a land crash... setup survival bag and ELT (Emergency Locator Transmitter) switch. Seward moves safety talk right along, addressing a water crash where Moses cuts him off. If they crash in water, Moses is screwed... *He can't swim.*

Moses tells Sue to put this thing in the air, "Rocky, here, wants to kill Bullwinkle." Seward lifts off.

#### INT. FLOATPLANE - DAY

##### (INCITING INCIDENT)

In the air, Moses sings a grating version of "A Boy Named Sue." He tells Seward to take over, but Seward refuses calling it "Sad bastard music." Citing the fact that his dad like Johnny Cash. When Moses asks if Seward's dad was a "sad bastard," Seward changes the subject, asking them where they want to scout for moose. Moses says east... way east. In Russia. Big "moose" over there. Seward knows this is anything but your normal moose hunt, but Moses offers him ten-times his daily rate (Moses pulls out a money clip -- walking around cash). Seward consents, unable to turn down the cash in hand, diverting the plane westbound.

#### INT. FLOATPLANE - DAY

This portion of the flight is much more tense as Seward navigates a soupy fogbank. The first polar northerly is settling in over the Bering Strait and soon the door to get back home will slam closed. Land is spotted through the fog. Moses whistles the intro to "Song of the Volga Boatman" signifying... Russia. Song carries us over to...

#### EXT. SIBERIAN COVE - DAY

A luxury SUV sits parked on the remote coastline. Two RUSKIE THUGS share a cigarette -- one has a KALISHNIKOV slung across his chest. The BUZZ of a plane prop crescendos, growing closer, as the floatplane emerges from the fogbank, and touches down on the water. One man drops the cigarette and stamps it out.

#### INT. FLOATPLANE - DAY / EXT. COVE - DAY

Seward leers from the cockpit as Moses deals with the Russians on shore. He nervously checks his watch every few seconds. Seward jumps, startled, as Rocco chucks an anonymous black duffle bag -- one of many -- now filling the plane's hull. Rocco says that's the last of it Seward tries to hurry Rocco who asks for the bag. Seward reaches for the Gucci carry-on but Rocco stops him... the other bag. The only other bag in the plane

is the waterproof survival bag. Seward tries to correct Rocco but he vehemently insists. Seward hands it over and Rocco slogs back to shore with the survival kit in hand.

Seward watches, from a distance, as the pair of men exchange handshakes, Rocco hands one of the Russians a bag. The Russian peers inside, and just as a perplexed look crosses his face, Rocco pulls the .44 mag and executes the man. Rocco swings the piece on the second Russian but he swipes at the pistol sending the shot wide. As the two men grapple from control of the gun, Moses grabs the automatic rifle slung around the dead Russian and indiscriminately blows both Rocco and the second Russian away. Seward, watches petrified, as Moses struts his way back toward the plane. Kalashnikov still in his clutches. Seward snaps from his daze, toggling switches, firing up the engine, and begins a slow taxi away. Moses runs toward the plane, high stepping through the coastal waters, getting closer and closer but the water getting deeper and deeper. Almost there, but Moses only has chest deep at this point. Moses moment of brief hesitation allows Seward to finally gain the speed necessary to lift off the water. As he lifts skyward, Moses rattles off a string of gunfire down the length of the plane. Hammering the engine block, smashing out the windshield, and causing the prop to spit and sputter. The plane bucks wildly but, somehow, Seward manages to guide the floatplane skyward leaving Moses in his rearview.

#### INT. FLOATPLANE - DAY

Seward fights the crippled plane and the storm across the Strait. The Arctic elements assault him through the broken out windshield: wind, snow, sleet, hail. Seward glances at the Gucci carry-on sitting beside him in the passenger seat. Flips it open to reveal stacks upon stacks of shrink-wrapped hundred dollar bills. Seward can barely react when a flashing yellow “Master Caution” ALARM sounds -- snaps bag shut. Seward frantically scans his control panel for the problem. Taps the oil pressure gauge -- the needle so low it’s about to snap off. Seward checks his GPS and locates a tiny spec of land surrounded by a literal ocean of blue. Banks the plane off course toward the island for an emergency landing.

#### EXT. DIOMEDE COAST - DAY

A heavily dressed Inuit huntress, FERNO, huddles in the cockpit of long kayak off the coast of the tiny island of Diomedes -- barren and volcanic, having blown it’s top long before the age of man. Duck decoys, carved from driftwood, surround the little vessel. Ferno, archaic side-by-side shotgun broken across her lap, makes funny DUCK NOISES calling in a flock of seaducks. The flying V heads right for her. Ferno snaps the shotgun closed and levels it on the front bird, when Seward’s FLOATPLANE explodes from the fogbank behind the birds, it’s prop mulching half the flock.

The plane buzzes over Ferno’s head, dropping her to the bottom of the boat, giving her a far too close of shave. Ferno, wide-eyed, pokes her head above the gunwale of the boat

watching the out of control plane attempt to land.

#### INT. FLOATPLANE - CONTINUOUS

Seward, now not only assaulted with wind and sleet through the broken out windshield, but also covered in pureed bird and feathers, manages to touch the plane down on the choppy coastal waters, when a jagged outcropping of rocks appears unavoidably through the mist. Seward can't react as the prop strikes the rocks, sending the plane cartwheeling end over end. Seward attempts to free himself from the wreckage as the plane slips below the icy waters of the Bering Sea, but his leg is pinned between the crumpled front end and the seat. He takes a deep breath as water floods the cockpit, tugging at the stuck leg that won't budge. The plane sinks lower and lower, as Seward's movements become less frantic and slow, the last of his breath bubbles from his mouth, his eyes roll back in their sockets as the plane comes to a rest on the sea floor about sixty feet below the surface (on the edge of the sea shelf, feet from dropping off into nothingness). Just then, Ferno appears at the plane's side. Tries the door, jammed. Swims through the broken out windshield and manages to pry an unconscious Seward loose, swimmingly him toward the surface. Quick shot of the Gucci carry-on stuck in front of the passenger's seat.

#### EXT. DIOMEDE - COVE - DAY

#### (ACT I BREAK)

Seward lays in the bottom of a speeding aluminum boat slipping in and out of consciousness. He glances up to the striking Inuit woman huddled over the top of him, paddling the kayak with all she's got. Darkness closes around Ferno as Seward passes out for good.

### ACT II

#### EXT. SIBERIAN TOWN - DAY (1)

Moses drives the dead Russian's SUV through a dilapidated post-Soviet hamlet -- snow starting to blanket the Arctic. Moses turns every head in town. Stops at what looks to be the town's mercantile.

#### INT. MERCANTILE - DAY

Moses steps in and tries to communicate to the simple SHOPKEEPER that he is in need of a phone. It is all lost on the man, who doesn't budge, even as Moses makes the universal sign for phone. Moses helps himself, peering over the counter and grabs the phone. Dials a number, catches the shopkeeper still gapping at him, (re: suit) "What's the matter, never seen Armani before?" Someone picks up on the other end of the line. Moses simply says "It's me. There's been a problem..."

#### INT. OLIGARCH PALACE - SAUNA - DAY

OLIGARCH lays in steamy sauna, getting his bare back whipped with seaweed by NUDE MASSEUSE. A TUXEDOED SERVANT holds a gold plated phone before the oligarch. Oligarch hangs it up. Waves off the servant with "Go on then. Get the chopper." Servant bows and exits. Masseuse continues to with seaweed whipping.

#### INT. EGOAK COMPOUND - BEDROOM - DAY

Seward awakens under a mound of sealskins with an ancient Inuit woman hovering over the top of him, CLOTILDA. Seward is very lost and confused until Ferno walks in and the pieces come falling into place. Remembers Ferno saving him, and then, just as quickly, remembers the bag of money. Asks where his bag is, which instantly makes Ferno dislike Seward that much more -- besides being a gussak. She apologizes for saving Seward's life over his luggage -- his bag is at the bottom of the Bering Sea. Seward lunges out of bed and crumples to the ground, revealing his injured leg. Clo helps him back to bed and tell him all he can do now is rest and eat his weight in stink flipper. Seward worriedly repeats, "Stink flipper...?" Cue Gross Inuit Food / Ferno Providing Sequence...

#### INT. EGOAK COMPOUND - BEDROOM - DAY

Plate of unappetizing "stink flipper" or "stink head (fermented seal flipper or decaying salmon heads) sits in front of Seward. "And what exactly is stink flipper?" Clotilda explains.

#### INT. EGOAK COMPOUND - BEDROOM - MORNING

Seward wakes to yapping dogs. Glances out his window to see Ferno harnessing her sled dogs. She is great with them; happy, energetic.

Says goodbye to Clotilda with a "KUNIK" -- Eskimo kiss -- nuzzles each of Clo's rosy cheeks and then she returns the favor. She mashes away.

#### INT. EGOAK COMPOUND - BEDROOM - DAY

Seward sits up reading (looking better). Ferno traipses in with the day's kill (string of birds and seal). Seward says hello and she grunts her response.

#### INT. EGOAK COMPOUND - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Seward limps into kitchen remarking that something smells delicious, as Clo serves Kivaq (duck cooked inside a the hollowed out body of a seal). Seward mutters that it's



“Talk about the Turducken from hell.” Ferno isn’t amused.

#### INT. EGOAK COMPOUND - MORNING

Seward stands in the bedroom window, already awake watching the same scene of Ferno harnessing her sled dogs. Gives Clo a KUNIK kiss and mushes off. Seward turns away and drops his pants to examine his leg, carefully removing the dressing. The wound is healing nicely, when Clo steps in with breakfast. Seward grabs for a blanket to cover himself. Clo, seemingly oblivious to his nudity, serves him pickled oosik. “Ew-sick?” “Oosik. Walrus penis.” Wide-eyed, Seward holds up the twenty inch penis as Clotilda walks out and makes a small penis crack, causing Seward to glance under the blanket at his own unit. He stops Clo before she can exit, and asks why she and Ferno touch their noses to each other’s cheeks every morning. She says, “We’re sniffing each other.” “Sniffing?” Clo explains that it is non-erotic form of refamiliarizing yourself with the scent of “your people.”

#### EXT. EGOAK COMPOUND - DAY

Seward limps outside. Establish the little village of Diomedes and that winter has officially arrived -- snow and ring of ice forming around the island, gradually moving outward toward the Alaskan mainland in the far distance. His eyes fix on the mainland for a long beat.

#### EXT. EGOAK COMPOUND - BACK - DAY

Seward snoops around the junk pile in back of the house: oil drums, dog kennels, and an old snowmachine. Seward tries the starter to no avail. Flips open the hood to find a rodent’s nest where the engine should be.

Clotilda comes outside, surprising Seward, and he suspiciously slams the hood cover closed. She says Ferno will be home still with the day’s kill. If Seward’s healthy enough to stroll around he’s healthy enough to help clean the narwhal. Seward’s face falls as he trudges toward the home.

#### INT. EGOAK COMPOUND - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Dinner over, Clo clears the table. Seward and Ferno sit across from each other. Clo comments on how Seward didn’t eat his narwhal. He says he’s stuffed and couldn’t have another bite. Clo asks, “Not even for a little Eskimo ice cream?” Seward perks up at the thought of normal food and says yes. Clo serves he and Ferno bowls of glop that orange sprinkle looking things on top. Seward’s face falls. He asks Ferno what Eskimo ice cream is. Ferno explains it’s whipped walrus fat with berries. Seward pokes at the orange sprinkles, “What kind of berries?” Ferno says, “Salmon (eggs).” Seward pushes the bowl of ice cream away looking ill. This annoys Ferno who makes a comment about Seward

lounging around all day, eating their food. He is a gussak -- lazy white man. Stays home performing womanly duties instead of hunting and providing. Seward defends himself claiming he made his living as a hunter back home. Ferno scoffs, "Gussaks don't know how to hunt. Only how to kill." Ferno takes his bowl of ice cream and eats it. Her comment having left an impression on Seward.

#### EXT. EGOAK COMPOUND - MORNING

Ferno harnesses the frenzied sled dogs as she preps to head out for the day's hunt. Seward emerges outside and asks to join her, eager to prove himself as a hunter. Ferno refuses, when Clotilda emerges out on the porch and convinces Ferno to take Seward. Reluctantly, Ferno consents and gives Clo a Kunik. Clo grabs Seward, much to his surprise, and gives him a Kunik as well. Seward stands a blushing and giddy like a school boy, when a annoyed Ferno grabs him and shoves him onto the dogsled ahead of her, wrapping her arms around him like two people would ride a motorcycle. The mush off.

#### EXT. DIOMEDE COAST - DAY

Seward nervously tip toes his way across a CRACKING and MOANING sheet of sea ice ringing the island. Suggests maybe that's far enough. Ferno says, "Nonsense, it's already three inches thick. Soon we'll be able to sled all the way to the mainland." Seward asks, "When?" "Weeks? Days? Depends on the next northerly." "Great. Let's come back then." Seward turns back and Ferno jumps up and down on the ice to prove her point, scaring the shit out of Seward and dropping him to his belly.

Ferno howls in laughter for the first time -- pointing and laughing. Seward, pride wounded, gathers himself up dusting off the snow.

#### EXT. DIOMEDE COAST - ICE FIELD - SEAL BREATHING HOLE - DAY

Seward huddles over a small opening in the ice as he sets a NOOSE SNARE TRAP of sorts around the hole and camouflages it with snow. Ferno whispers to Seward as they back away from the hole unraveling a length rope as he goes. They hid behind a little mound of snow watching and waiting as Ferno explains seal breathing holes -- a series of openings, spaced apart every hundred feet or so, that follow along the island's underwater shelf. Seals have to come up for a breath every hour or so and that's when you... A BUBBLE glubs from the opening in the ice, causing Ferno to trail off. Seward readies himself when a fur seal rears its cute little head. Seward launches the spear, which sails wildly overhead and skips off down the ice. The seal slips safely back under the ice. Ferno rolls on the ice, again, howling with laughter. Says something funny about the terrible throw (Clotilda throws better). Seward, this time can't help but join in the laughter.

## EXT. DIOMEDE COAST - DAY

Ferno packages a dead seal into the dogsled, preparing to go home. Seward stands on the edge of the ice, staring into the icy depths, casually asks if they're nearby where the plane went down. Ferno says otherside of the island, when Seward catches sight of bazooka-type weapon changing the subject. It is a HARPOON GUN WITH EXPLODING HEAD. Asks what she hunts with that, "Arctic elephant?" Ferno casually replies, "Arveq... whale." Seward is aghast at the idea of killing a whale. Ferno is offended and doesn't understand. Says one whale will sustain the entire village through the long winter months. "Ever heard of save the fucking whales?" "No." "Because you just don't, that's why. Same as you wouldn't kill a man." Ferno eyes sear into Seward, "Not unless I had to."

## INT. RUSSIA - OLIGARCH PALACE - TROPHY ROOM - NIGHT (2)

Moses strolls with the Oligarch through his trophy room of every exotic animal the planet has to offer. A servant hammers something to the wall down the line. Moses has just finished relaying the tall-tale he crafted of Seward killing Rocco and the Russians and making off with the money and drugs. The Oligarch seems preoccupied responding with a story about a particular hunt (bear hunt -- tied to tree -- something creepy and violent).

Moses and the Oligarch reach what the servant has been hammering up... an empty mounting board with Moses' name engraved on the bottom. Oligarch tells Moses it's either the money, or Moses head... literally. Moses petrified, says he'll get the money. Oligarch cheers up, clapping Moses on the back, excellent. "And I have just the man to help you find this... boy named Sue."

## INT. RUSSIA - FLOPHOUSE - NIGHT

(V.O.) He's, how you say... krokodil." The CROCODILE, muscle- bound drug addict covered in head to two with scaly gangrenous sores -- hence the name -- shoots up on a dingy mattress in a drug den while HUMMING "Song of the Volga Boatmen." Injects krokodil into his groin. Two pairs of fancy boots, belonging to the Oligarch's thugs, step before him. He glances up, devoid of emotion.

## INT. EGOAK COMPOUND - KITCHEN - NIGHT

It is tense around the Egoak table as Clotilda, chipper as ever, says she's hope her hunters are hungry. Seward puts on a brave face when he sees the bowl of cubed pieces of fat. Looks, great, Clo... What is it? Clo responds muktuk. "What's muktuk?" Ferno smiles and leans in close Seward -- close enough to kiss him, smell him -- and takes a big bite of muktuk right in front of him and says "Whale." Sprinkling him with bits of masticated whale. Ferno marches off to her room, muttering something about being right that Seward (gussaks) was no hunter. Clo a little embarrassed, apologizes for Ferno saying

she's been had a lot on her plate since her parents were taken. "Taken by who?" "Qallupilluk... The Monster." Seward watches as Clo excuses herself and hurries after her granddaughter. Leaving him utterly confused.

INT. EGOAK COMPOUND - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Seward tosses and turns in the throes of a night terror...

INT. SEWARD'S UNCONSCIOUS - CONTINUOUS

See Seward's nightmare of Qalupalik -- underwater, trapped under the ice -- a monster (long hair, long fingernails, scaly green skin like a crocodile -- make a distinctive HUMMING SOUND when they are near) rises from the dark depths of the ocean in a flash grabbing at Seward.

INT. EGOAK COMPOUND - BEDROOM - MORNING

Ferno kicks Seward awake, rousing him from the nightmare, the next morning and tells him to get up. Seward makes a comment that he thought she said gussaks can't hunt. Ferno says they're not hunting, they're fishing. Even the women and children fish.

EXT. DIOMEDE - COVE - DAY

The whole village is out for the final fish of the season. Ferno moves to the boats with the men. Seward's leg isn't quite seaworthy so he stays on land with Clo and the rest of the women.

EXT. DIOMEDE WHARF - DAY - FISHING MONTAGE

See the societal roles of the village. Village warming to Seward. Seward eyeing Ferno (biting fishing line, squirting fresh fish eggs into her mouth, etc.)

EXT. DIOMEDE WHARF - LATER

After a long, wet, slimy day of fishing, the village disperses and say goodbye to Seward. Villager after villager give him a KUNIK kisses. Ferno can't help NALUKATAQ. Seward asks Ferno what that is. She explains it's the winter festival to celebrate village prosperity and to pray for the whales to return before the Strait freezes over. (establish that the whales (bowheads) migrate past Diomedes one day every winter, before the Strait freezes over, on their way to warmer breeding grounds). Ferno says Seward probably wouldn't want to go. He says he'll only go if Ferno wants him there. She says, it would please Grandmother.

EXT. DIOMEDE - VILLAGE CENTER - NIGHT

Seward arrives at Nalukataq, which is in full swing. Traditional food, throat singing, dancing and games. Seward moves through the crowd, checking out the festivities and greeting many newfound friends until he sees a beautiful Ferno in traditional dress. They walk on together.

EXT. DIOMEDE - VILLAGE CENTER - NIGHT

Seward and Ferno move to where the blanket toss is taking place. Villagers spot them together and push them onto the blanket together. They bounce on the blanket like two kids on a trampoline.

Afterwards they laugh and hold each other, growing closer when something in the sky catches Ferno's attention. She tells Seward to follow her.

EXT. DIOMEDE - HILL SIDE - NIGHT

Ferno scales the side of the barren volcanic island. Seward chasing after, barely showing a limp. Seward tells her to wait up, she shouts back to hurry up.

EXT. DIOMEDE - TOP OF ISLAND - NIGHT

**(MIDPOINT)**

They reach the squared off top and sit beside one another out of breath. Ferno states that you can see the whole of the world from here -- from East to West. There's Russia. There's Alaska. And there's where I saved you from Qalupalik." Ferno points to the pyramidal rock outcropping that sunk Seward's plane. "Seward says "Qalupalik?" "Where I pulled you from the water." "Yes, but what is it? A Qalupalik?" Ferno explains Qalupaliks are green humanoid creatures that snatch people into the depths of the ocean. It's a myth, a fairy tale told by the elders to scare children away from ice edge." Ferno asks, "Why do you ask?" Seward says, "No reason. Clo mentioned it once. Ferno laughs, "Granny's just trying to give you nightmares." Seward says it's working. Ferno says, "They say you can hear Qalupalik humming the closer he gets." They sit in silence when Ferno links on to Seward's elbow and starts to HUM. Seward says "Not funny." They laugh and looks to kiss Ferno when she points to the sky, Look. It's beginning. Seward looks skyward as Aurora Borealis begins. Seward in utter awe asks "What is it?" Ferno says it's a special world inhabited by those lost to the sea. The changing rays represent the deceased souls playing ball with a walrus head. Seward asks, "Is that where your parents are?" Ferno points to a flash of pink across the sky, saying, "There's mother..." points out a bolt of green. "And there's father." Seward says, "They're beautiful." Ferno leans in to Seward, their lips centimeters apart, she softly nuzzles her nose to his cheek and gently smells him. Seward closes his eyes as she inhales his scent.

#### INT. SKIPLANE - NIGHT

Moses, riding right seat, glances over at... Krok flies a skiplane over an expanse of ice and dark water, staring straight ahead ever HUMMING "Song of the Volga Boatmen." Dark, ominous tune carries us over into...

#### EXT. HUNTING LODGE - NIGHT

Skiplane lands and skids across the now frozen lake before the buttoned up hunting lodge. Only a single light aglow in the lodge.

#### INT. EDGOAK HOME - BEDROOM - MORNING

Still dark out, Ferno lays asleep on pop open, wide-awake. Eases out from not to wake her. Grabs his boots and

#### EXT. EGOAK HOME - BEDROOM - MORNING

Seward's chest. His eyes under her arm, careful tiptoes out.

Seward harnesses the dogs. One BARKS and he hushes it with a chunk of muktuk. He tells the dogs to "Go." "Mush" The don't budge. He pushes and pulls them. Finally, he yells, "Aarigaa!" They take off without him on the sled. He chases after.

#### EXT. DIOMEDE - COVE - DAY

Sunlight cracks the horizon as Seward stops the dogsled on the frozen over cove near the distinct outcropping of rocks that took his plane down and Ferno pointed out last night. He peers where the ice edge meets water, peering into its icy depths for his plane. Seward is mesmerized as a HUMMING sound crescendos, louder and louder, until a violent explosion of water sends Seward stumbling backward onto the ice. He looks out to see a pod of bowhead whales rolling weaving their way through the maze of ice spidering across the Strait. Shooting water out of their blowholes like a geyser. Seward scrambles to the dogsled and shouts "Aarigaa!" They take off.

#### INT. EGOAK HOME - BEDROOM - MORNING

Still asleep, Ferno reaches for Seward and comes up empty handed. She wakes, looking around puzzled. She starts to grow a little self-conscious; covers herself with the blanket when... Seward explodes in the house yelling for her. He bursts into the bedroom and she asks what is it? Seward says, "The whales. They're here." Ferno leaps out of bed and plants a big kiss on Seward. She rushes out leaving a love-struck Seward reeling behind.

#### EXT. DIOMEDE WHARF - DAY

The village is in a frenzy gearing up for the big whale hunt. Ferno loads into a kayak with other hunters and gives Seward the rundown on the harvest. The kayakers will calve a whale off from the pod and corral it into the cove opposite the island. The rest of the villagers will follow along behind acting as a roving butchers unit. Seward should keep pace on the sled ready to help when they trap the whale in the cove. Seward nods, ready for this. Ferno shoves off in the kayak. Seward takes off on the sled.

#### EXT. DIOMEDE COAST - DAY

Seward races on land paralleling the kayakers weaving their way through the maze of ice. The tiny boats lost among the herd of prehistoric monsters.

#### EXT. DIOMEDE - COVE - DAY

Seward arrives back at the cove marked by the distinct outcropping of rocks that took down his plane. He is the first one there. Glances to the point, waiting, worrying, when a geyser of water shoots out near the point, followed by Ferno and the kayakers behind it. Hooting and hollering, slapping the water with their paddles, corralling the whale into the cove, headed right for Seward. Ferno calls to him to get the harpoon gun. Seward remembers and goes tearing into the dog sled and finds the harpoon gun, loads the exploding head into place. He steadies himself on the ice, setting the approaching whale in his sights, like a soldier ready to launch a RPG when the whale disappears below the surface of the water for a long beat. After a moment, Seward lowers the harpoon gun and shrugs, shouting to Ferno, "Where'd it go --" As the giant whale explodes through the sheet beneath Seward's feet, sending him flying. The whale's body slam, sends a fissure running down the ice field, breaking off a massive length of ice between it and the kayakers, and opening up a narrow gauntlet of water heading out of the cove, back to open water. The whale rolls down the gauntlet. Ferno and the other kayakers trapped by the ice flow created by the whale, shout and rally, as do the rest of the villagers that have caught up, for Seward to shoot it. Seward regains his wits, grabs the harpoon gun and chases after on dogsled, gaining ground, but the end of the cove, which spells escape from the whale is nearing. At the last moment, Seward zooms ahead of the whale, at the opposite point of the cove, hops of the still moving sled, readies the harpoon gun on the approaching bowhead -- like shooting whales in a barrel -- when he sees it, sixty feet below the icy blue depths, his sunken plane.

Seward stares into the water, mesmerized, a HUMMING NOISE crescendos when, Ferno's shout snaps him from his daze and Seward launches a wild arcing shot well over the back of the whale, blowing a gapping hole in the ice, but not putting a scratch on the whale. The bowhead rolls back into open water, diving out of sight to safety. The villagers go quiet. The severity of what just happened hits Seward. The look on Ferno's face says it all.

#### INT. HUNTING LODGE - OFFICE - NIGHT

Kermit sits tied to the office chair, his face bloodied and bruised. Moses socks him a good one and asks where the ELT (Emergency Locator Transmitter) broadcasts to. The feisty old codger spits out a glob of blood and denies knowing what Moses is talking about. Moses reiterates what Seward told him in the safety talk. Kermit says it sounds made up. Moses looks to the Krokodil for help who shoots up in the back of the room. He casually tells Moses to take Kermit's eye, which gets both of the other men's attention. Moses a little unnerved himself asks the Krokodil to repeat himself. The Krokodil roasts his syringe needle with his lighter to a searing orange glow while explaining, "His eye. Take it. He lie again, take the other." Krokodil rises with searing orange needle HUMMING "Song of the Volga Boatmen" as he approaches Kermit. Moses backs away in fear. Kermit squirms trying to free himself from his binds. The Krokodil clamps his hand on Kermit's face, prying open his eyelids, lowers the searing hot needle to the eyeball, millimeters from contact....

#### EXT. HUNTING LODGE - NIGHT

Kermit's PIERCING SCREAM rips through the quiet winter night.

#### EXT. DIOMEDE - TOWN HALL - NIGHT

Blowing snow, howling winds. A storm rages outside the village's little town hall.

#### INT. DIOMEDE - TOWN HALL - NIGHT

A storm rages inside the town hall as well. Villagers argue and speak over one another about what they plan to survive the long winter months without whale. Seward sits there, head hung like he is on trial. Seward tries to make up for it with a total gussak comment like, don't worry I'll get one tomorrow. The town members wave him off immediately firing back with the whale's have already migrated south for the breeding season.

The Strait will be frozen over by morning cutting off fishing until the spring thaw. The birds have flown south. The examples of just how bad they are screwed come one after another. Ferno, tells Seward to go home. Seward limp out with his tail between his leg. Ferno calls for quiet taking over the meeting.

#### INT. EGOAK HOME - NIGHT

Seward lays awake in bed. Hears Ferno and Clotilda return. Seward tries to apologize to Clo but she shakes her head and moves around him to bed. Seward tries to apologize to Ferno that it was an accident, but Ferno thinks he intentionally missed the shot to prove some gussak point about not killing whales -- based off previous argument. Fight culminates with Ferno shouting something like, (But you're not Inuit, and) "You are no



hunter!” Cuts Seward to the core. Ferno then states that the Strait will be solid after the storm. She’ll sled Seward to the mainland tomorrow where he can’t hurt (Granny) anymore. Ferno goes to bed.

INT. EGOAK HOME - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Another sleepless night for Seward. Tossing and turning, clearly upset, finally tears himself out of bed.

EXT. EGOAK HOME - NIGHT

The storm still rages as Seward harnesses the dogs. The whimper and whine, even they don’t want to be out in this weather. Seward is curt and sharp with them. Mushes off.

EXT. DIOMEDE - COVE - NIGHT

Seward fights the sled into the storm, onto the ice field, to the fissure the whale created above his plane. Seward strips down in the blinding cold, ties a length of rope to the dogsled beside the opening and dives in.

EXT. OCEAN - UNDERWATER - CONTINUOUS

Seward emerges through the opening into an eerie, silent blue world. Seward swims his way down to the plane with rope in hand.

INT. SUNKEN FLOATPLANE - UNDERWATER - CONTINUOUS

Seward works his way through the broken out windshield and wrestles the GUCCI CARRY-ON -- where we left it -- free. Seward pushes off the plane’s control panel for a quick exit, unknowingly stepping on and activating the RED ELT SWITCH.

EXT. OCEAN - UNDERWATER - CONTINUOUS

Seward claws his way upward, the HUMMING NOISE growing louder and louder, but his movements begin to slow in the frigid water, his muscles cramping and contracting in on themselves. Running out of oxygen, the HUMMING NOISE screaming, Seward hallucinates a green QALUPALIK monster shoot out of the black depths below him and latch onto his ankle. Seward, in reality, is a slowly sinking ball of contorted muscle. Seward musters his final shreds of air and energy and tugs on the rope in hand.

EXT. DIOMEDE - COVE - NIGHT

Above on the ice, the tug of the rope below, slowly inches the sled backwards toward the opening in the ice. The dogs spook as the sled nears the water and take off running.

EXT. OCEAN - UNDERWATER - NIGHT

Seward is yanked from the Qalupalik's grasp by the rope and is towed upward in a flash like Aquaman ascending from the sea.

EXT. DIOMEDE - COVE - NIGHT

Seward shoots out of the opening and skids across the ice like a seal on its belly. Coughs and sputters, shivering, GUCCI CARRY-ON clutched to his chest.

INT. HUNTING LODGE - HANGAR - NIGHT

Kermit sits before a SILENT RADAR SCREEN looking like a former shell of his feisty old self -- bloodied and bruised with his one eye swollen shut and weeping blood. Moses and the Krokodil stand behind him watching the same painfully silent screen, when the Krokodil simply tells Moses to "Kill him." Moses reluctantly consents, puts the gun to the back of Kermit's head, who clamps his eyes shut ready for death, when the radar screen PINGS. Everyone freezes, Kermit's eyes pops open. It PINGS again, and again. All three huddle over the screen. Moses asks where is he.

Kermit says he's stuck on Diomedes somewhere. The Krokodil walks off. Moses asks how long to get there. Kermit says less than an hour but they should wait for the storm to pass. Moses says nonsense, they fly the twin-prop turbo transport in Kermit's fleet to cut through the storm. And he's bringing Kermit along to guide them in to Diomedes.

INT. TWIN PROP TURBO PLANE - NIGHT

Moses in the captain's seat firing up the big powerful twin prop engines, preparing for lift off, Kermit sitting right chair. Moses glances in the back and realizes they're missing a passenger, asks where the Krokodil went when the Russian speeds a snowmachine into the belly of the transport plane. Closes the hatch and straps himself into the seat behind Kermit. Moses lifts off into the storm.

EXT. DIOMEDE -

**(ACT II BREAK)**

Storm breaking nearly stopped to the Alaskan mainland in the distance across the frozen sheet of ice, and then back to the few lights marking the little village of Diomedes. There's nothing there for him anymore. Seward pushes the dogs across the frozen Bering Strait for Alaska.

**ACT III**

INT. EGOAK HOME - BEDROOM - MORNING

Ferno knocks and enters Seward's bedroom, perhaps looking to apologize for what she said the night before, but he is nowhere to be found.

EXT. BERING STRAIT - DAY

Sunlight spills onto the Strait as Seward mashes across it. Hears the unmistakable BUZZ of a plane. Stops and gazes up.

INT. TWIN PROP TURBO PLANE - DAY

Moses flies toward the unmistakable flat-topped island of Diomedes in the near distance. Asks Kermit if that's it. Kermit says he'd bet his life on it when The Krokodil, behind, casually opens the passenger door and throws Kermit out of the plane.

EXT. BERING STRAIT - CONTINUOUS

Seward goes wide-eyed as he watches a tiny figure tumble from the plane downward, downward, and cringes.

INT. TWIN PROP TURBO PLANE - CONTINUOUS

The Krokodil closes the door, and Moses asks, "What the hell was that?" Krokodil calmly reseats himself and says, "Dead weight."

EXT. BERING STRAIT - DAY

Seward mashes up to Kermit's body splattered across the ice. Has a little moment realizing it to be Kermit. Races furious back toward Diomedes.

EXT. EGOAK HOME - DAY

Ferno explodes outside and finds her dogs and sled missing as well. She kicks something and curses as a twin prop turbo cruises overhead and skids to a stop before the tiny village.

EXT. DIOMEDES - WHARF - DAY

Ferno, Clotilda and the rest of the village migrate to the big-bellied plane as Moses disembarks. Moses inquires about a white pilot who came through town a couple weeks ago. The village is wary of the strange man and don't say a word. A few villagers cast furtive glances at Ferno who remains tight lipped. Right then, the Krokodil zooms the snowmachine out of the belly of the transport plane, pulling up to the crowd. Clotilda eyes the scaly gangrenous sores on the Krokodil. She mutters, full of fear "Qalupalik..." pointing at the Krokodil. Clo and the Krokodil seemed equally frightened of the other. Moses asks what she said. Clotilda repeats the word, but no one translates for Moses.

Moses puts a gun to Clotilda's head and says he won't ask again, where's the white pilot. Ferno chirps up and says, "At the bottom of the Bering." She explains that she watched a plane go down some weeks ago, but no one came out. Your gussak pilot is there." Moses takes the gun of Clo, training it on Ferno, and gestures for her to get on the snowmachine. "Show me."

EXT. DIOMEDE COAST - DAY

Ferno, sandwiched between Moses and the Krokodil, tear across the coastal ice on the powerful snowmachine.

EXT. BERING STRAIT - DAY

Moses races the dogs back toward Diomedes in the distance.

EXT. DIOMEDE - COVE - SEAL BREATHING HOLE - DAY

Ferno, Moses, and the Krokodil arrive in the cove where Seward's plane went down, marked by the distinct outcropping of rocks. Ferno tells them the plane is underneath them, sixty feet down. Moses tells her to strip. Tells the Krokodil to do the same -- wants to make sure Seward is dead. Krokodil says no. Moses can't swim and says he doesn't have a choice. Trains the pistol on the Krok. The Krok stares at Moses as he strips and we know that he has crossed the wrong man. Krok rifles through the snowmachine and finds a spool of fishing line. They need a guideline, Ferno looks disappointed. Hands the spool to Moses. Ferno and the Krok plunge through the little opening in the ice. The fishing line unspools in Moses' grasp like his he's hooked into a lunker.

EXT. OCEAN - UNDERWATER - CONTINUOUS

Ferno and Krok swim into the eerie sub-ice world. Ferno leads the way, swimming downward. Krok follows close behind, towing the length of fishing line as he goes.

EXT. DIOMEDE - COVE - SEAL BREATHING HOLE - CONTINUOUS

Moses watches the spool unravel further and further in his hands, when he glances up and freezes in surprise. A dogsled sits parked in the near distance, driven by a Seward, but his identity is concealed by his heavy parka and sealskin hood -- he looks intuit from a distance. Moses looks like he's ice fishing. Seward and Moses sit locked in gaze for a tense beat.

EXT. OCEAN - UNDERWATER - CONTINUOUS

Ferno and the Krok grow near the plane.

EXT. DIOMEDE - COVE - SEAL BREATHING HOLE - CONTINUOUS

Moses and Seward still locked in standoff when Moses' eyes lock on the corner of the unmistakable GUCCI CARRY-ON strapped to the top of the dogsled. Moses casually drops the spool of fishing line through the hole in the ice, but that is the only signal Seward needs that Moses has made him. Seward mashes the dogs off toward the only cover on the barren sheet of ice -- the distinct outcropping of rocks. Moses hops on the snowmachine and guns it after him.

EXT. OCEAN - UNDERWATER - FLOATPLANE - CONTINUOUS

Ferno and the Krok peer into the cockpit from either side of the sunken plane. No Seward, no money. Krok glares at Ferno when the previously taut fishing line in his hand goes limp, the spool in the distance, falling away to the sea floor. Krok looks back to Ferno who is already swimming away paralleling the sea shelf deeper into dark waters, quick as a seal. Krok doesn't have the energy or the oxygen to chase her and claws upwards for the surface.

EXT. DIOMEDE - COVE - DAY

Moses pops off shots, quickly closing in on Seward. Almost to the outcropping of rocks.

EXT. OCEAN - UNDERWATER - DAY

Ferno continues to swim parallel along sea shelf.

EXT. ICE SHEET - DAY

Looking down on the ice, we see the Krok swing upward and collides with an immovable ceiling of ice. Punches it, kicks it. Claws along the ice sheet, searching for an opening.

EXT. DIOMEDE - COVE - ROCK OUTCROPPING - DAY

Seward reaches the little formation and takes cover behind it. Hears Moses idle the snowmachine on the other side. Makes his way toward Seward pistol in hand. SINGS "BOY NAMED SUE." Both know he's trapped. Seward exercises his only option, opens the flap on the dogsled, and grabs the Gucci carry-on full of millions. He tells Moses to take the money. He throws it around the corner of the formation, skidding it across the ice. Take it and leave.

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